

The One Story and the Four Ways of Telling:

The relationship between New Zealand literary autobiography and spiritual autobiography.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis intends to examine the most significant examples of literary autobiography in New Zealand to the present day. These are *Sargeson* (1981) by Frank Sargeson, *I Passed This Way* (1979) by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *An Autobiography* (1994) by Lauris Edmond, and *An Autobiography* (1989) by Janet Frame.

My aims are twofold: to argue that there is a general tendency in New Zealand autobiography to write spiritual autobiography (this involves first showing how the above are spiritual autobiographies), and to interrogate why this is. Is it a case of the general social climate in New Zealand, particularly in regards to the status of the artist in a provincial puritan society, or is it due to different, personal reasons that each writer writes spiritual autobiography?

In the introduction I will briefly give an historical overview of New Zealand literary autobiography (and biography also, because together they have emerged from a few isolated works in the 1950s to be significant literary genres), summarising why the above are the most significant, and discussing why I have excluded Charles Brasch's *Indirections* (1981). I will also discuss the origins and history of the spiritual autobiography, particularly focusing on the Christian conversion experience which is replaced by the epiphany in the secular (non-religious; literary) autobiography. Epiphanies in the modernist fiction of Katherine Mansfield and James Joyce will be compared to confirm the basic structure of the modernist epiphany; Joyce is especially significant because his semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is also a spiritual autobiography, and has been influential in the New Zealand context.

Chapter 1 will focus on Sargeson. Chapter 2 will look at Edmond and Ashton-Warner concurrently. The final chapter, Chapter 3, will examine Frame. There will be a brief conclusion in which all four authors will be compared.

Details of all references in the text will appear in the List of Works Consulted.

INTRODUCTION.

I. A brief history of a brief history: New Zealand literary autobiography (and biography).

The decade most frequently associated with the beginnings of New Zealand literature is the 1930s, when the writers and poets usually referred to under the umbrella of the 'Phoenix group' began to form a local tradition that was different to previous New Zealand literature. Also in this decade, two autobiographical prose works were published in London by a poet who spent most of his life 'travelling between Britain and New Zealand'.¹ D'Arcy Cresswell's *A Poet's Progress* appeared in 1930, followed by *Present Without Leave* in 1939. Born eight years after Mansfield, Cresswell was slightly older than most of the 'new' writers of the thirties. The time he was writing autobiography was the time most New Zealand writers of that generation were writing their self-consciously New Zealand poetry and stories. They were in the initial phase of forming a national literature, a literature that as yet was too new and too raw for literary autobiography to be written.

In 1950-51, however, Frank Sargeson's autobiographical 'Up Onto the Roof and Down Again' was published in four issues of *Landfall*. By 1950 Sargeson had been writing full-time for nearly 20 years, and a distinctly new phase had developed in New Zealand literature: a younger generation of writers and poets, the 'Wellington group', was producing work of their own, while the old guard of Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, and Charles Brasch, was still actively controlling methods and standards of print (Glover, in Christchurch with the Caxton and later the Pegasus Press; Brasch, in Dunedin, as the editor of *Landfall*). A sequence, a foundation, a sense of history was more clearly visible in New Zealand literature than before. Still, there was no place for a full-length literary autobiography. Even Sargeson realised that a writer must have made a contribution in their field before having the temerity to write literary autobiography, explaining later why

¹ *Frank Sargeson: A Life* by Michael King (Auckland: Viking, 1995), 160.

he did not extend his *Landfall* piece earlier: 'it had occurred to me that to write what would be taken to be my autobiography before I was out of my forties might be to find myself laughed at'.²

In the late 1950s, another autobiographical work by an important literary figure appeared in serial form, this time in the *New Zealand Listener*. Glover's *Hot Water Sailor*, written from his dictation, was accompanied by Russell Clark's comic illustrations. 'Glover's account of his life might best be described as an entertainment', says his biographer Gordon Ogilvie; '[t]here is also virtually nothing about his own writing; it is indeed a surprisingly un-literary production'.³ In 1962 the collected serial was published as a book, complete with Clark's artwork. In his 'Non-Fiction' chapter of *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Peter Gibbons notes that there were no full-length, serious literary autobiographies written in the 1960s, although there were other kinds of autobiographies, such as 'a graceful essay, *The Inland Eye* (1959), by E.H. McCormick', and 'a few reminiscences by people who also happened to be writers; the most entertaining are Denis Glover's *Hot Water Sailor* ..., Nelle Scanlon's *Road to Pencarrow* (1963), and Ngaio Marsh's *Black Beech and Honeydew: An Autobiography* (1966)' (96). Gibbons emphasises that 'these works dealt with writing only incidentally. Even Alan Mulgan's *The Making of a New Zealander* [1958] ... is not a work of literary autobiography in a consistent way.'

In the mid-1960s, Brasch initiated a 'Beginnings' series in *Landfall*. The first to contribute was E.S. Grenfell, and a footnote to his essay describes it as '[t]he first of a series in which writers tell how they began writing'.⁴ Grenfell was followed in consecutive issues by Janet Frame and Sargeson, and the programme continued until 1967.

In the 1970s, Sargeson, now himself in his 70s, and with many publications behind him, continued the autobiographical enterprise he had begun over 20 years earlier by publishing three volumes of autobiography: *Once is Enough: A Memoir* (1973), *More Than Enough: A Memoir* (1975), and *Never Enough! Places and People Mainly* (1977). These volumes, which were published collectively as *Sargeson* in 1981, constitute the

² *Never Enough! Places and People Mainly* (Auckland: Reed, 1977), 115.

³ *Denis Glover: His Life* (Auckland: Godwit, 1999), 325-26.

⁴ *Landfall* 72 (December 1964), 316.

first significant work of autobiography by a New Zealand writer. Another was published in 1979: Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *I Passed This Way*, monumental both in title and length.

In 1980, Charles Brasch's *Indirections: A Memoir 1909-1947* was published, seven years after his death. The autobiography was based on a manuscript left at Brasch's death which was heavily edited by James Bertram. '[I]t was agreed that I should attempt to reduce the bulk of the prose manuscript to a reasonable compass (about half the original length) and generally edit it for publication', Bertram states in the editorial note (xii). He continues: 'what I have tried to do is to preserve Brasch's own words, order and emphasis throughout, but to cut a considerable amount of personal and background detail'(xii); 'I have felt bound to keep the main sequence and outline as Brasch left it, and ... cut chiefly from the very full sections on Egypt, the Abbey and wartime England' (xiii).

In 1981, another posthumous autobiography was published. This was *Hot Water Sailor 1912-1962 & Landlubber Ho! 1963-1980*, a reprint of the autobiography which had appeared 20 years earlier, with a Part Two added to bring Glover's life up to date that Ogilvie describes as 'a mere eight short chapters in extent' (459). The remainder of the 1980s was dominated by Janet Frame, as her one-time mentor Sargeson had dominated the previous decade. *To the Is-land* (1982) was followed by *An Angel at My Table* (1984) and *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985). In 1989 the trilogy was published collectively as *An Autobiography*.

In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand prose*, Lawrence Jones' survey of literary autobiography from 1973-1985 includes a brief discussion of 'five relatively minor' autobiographies, all of which were published in the 1980s. The painter Toss Woollaston's *Sage Tea: An Autobiography* (1980) is included because 'his first ambitions were to be a poet and he writes very well' (318). Another is Mervyn Thompson's *All My Lives* (1980), which Jones describes as 'less than successful' (322). Jones also discusses Robin Hyde's *A Home in this World* (published in 1984 from a 1937 manuscript) and Alistair Campbell's *Island to Island* (1984), as well as Monte Holcroft's *The Way of a Writer* (1984) and *A Sea of Words* (1986), which Gibbons sums up thus:

‘Though in his memoirs he reconstitutes a wider world of writers and writing ... Holcroft says little about the processes of writing’ (98).

In 1989, the first of three volumes of autobiography by Lauris Edmond, *Hot October: An autobiographical story*, was published. In 1991 the second volume in this trilogy appeared, *Bonfires in the Rain*, as well as the autobiography of another poet, Ruth Dallas. *Curved Horizon: An Autobiography* is not a fully-developed autobiography: it is more of an outline of Dallas’s life that tends, especially towards the end, to concentrate on how she came to write particular poems, giving the reader cross-references to her *Collected Poems*. Although revealing of the times in which she lived, particularly in relation to the different roles that men and women occupied in society, it does not reveal too much of Dallas herself. A more prominent figure in the autobiography is Charles Brasch, whom Dallas aided in the production of *Landfall*; at times, it is as if Dallas hides behind Brasch. Sargeson, in his last volume especially, often concentrates his narrative on others, but never to the extent that we lose sight of the author as the subject of the autobiography.

In 1992 *The Quick World*, the third part of Edmond’s autobiography, was published. The collected trilogy, *An Autobiography*, appeared two years later. In 1984 Dennis McEldowney was able to state in his article ‘Recent Literary Biography’: ‘Four distinguished autobiographies, by Frank Sargeson, Janet Frame, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and Charles Brasch, have been published in recent years’ (47). His judgement is mirrored in Jones’ discrimination in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* of ‘the four major ones [autobiographies], by Frank Sargeson, Charles Brasch, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and Janet Frame’ (315). Edmond’s constitutes the fifth significant instalment in the approximately 25-year history of New Zealand literary autobiography to date, although there have been other minor autobiographies in the 1990s, such as Keith Sinclair’s *Halfway Round the Harbour: An Autobiography* (1993) (of which Gibbons says the author ‘airs very freely his opinions of various contemporary New Zealand male literary figures, but otherwise he says little about writers or writing, including his own’ [105]); Maurice Shadbolt’s memoirs *One of Ben’s: A New Zealand Medley* (1993) and *From the Edge of the Sky* (1999) (in the Author’s Note to the latter Shadbolt situates himself ‘in the realm of the

memoir, as distinct from that of the painstaking autobiographer’); and Noel Virtue’s *Once A Brethren Boy* (1995).

If the appearance of literary autobiography may be described as a coming-of-age in literary history, a sign of a country’s literary maturity, then another genre which heralds this is literary biography. The first biography of a New Zealand writer was Antony Alpers’ *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (1953). That Mansfield was the first biographical subject is unsurprising, given her international reputation. What is surprising is that critics have been slow to accept this biography as a New Zealand literary biography, mainly because the subject *lived* overseas, but also because much of the biography was *written* overseas. For example, in John Geraets’ 1989 article ‘Literary Biography in New Zealand’, he writes dismissively in parentheses after setting out the parameters of his discussion: ‘[t]he two Antony Alpers biographies of Katherine Mansfield [in 1980 Alpers published a ‘new’ biography of his subject] will not be considered in any detail here’ (88). In a footnote to this statement he explains: ‘In keeping with Dennis McEldowney’s definition, I take the two Alpers biographies ... as somewhat special and marginalised in this context. While funding was received from the Literary Fund (N.Z.) in the late 1940s, much of Alpers’ research and writing time was spent in Canada and Europe, and the biographies have very much a European context and implicit audience’ (103). Geraets is referring to McEldowney’s ‘Recent Literary Biography’, in which he states: ‘In the absence, to this moment, of more fully indigenous examples, Antony Alpers’s 1980 *Life of Katherine Mansfield* is still our exemplar of the full biography’ (55). Gibbons scotches this line of reasoning when he begins the literary biography section of his ‘Non-Fiction’ chapter by stating authoritatively: ‘The first substantial New Zealand work of literary biography was Antony Alpers’s *Katherine Mansfield* (1953)’ (106).

The next biography to appear was Nellie Macleod’s *A Voice on the Wind: The Story of Jessie Mackay* (1955). The next few decades saw the publication of several series of critical works showcasing New Zealand authors and containing various amounts of biographical information. In the late 1960s the first titles of *New Zealand Profiles* were published by Reed. Of about 30 pages in length, these were barely chapters, but

contained some biographical detail. Also in the late 1960s, and continuing into the 1970s, the *Twayne's World Authors Series* featured New Zealand writers. These works were lengthier than Reed's and usually devoted the first chapter to biography. In his 1978 article 'New Zealand Literary History' Keith Sinclair describes these as 'small books', and the Oxford University Press' *New Zealand Writers and Their Work* series, which ran from 1975 to 1986, as 'booklets' (69). The 1980s also saw the *Introducing ...* series, monographs by Longman Paul. McEldowney's article mentions another series as well, 'Auckland's *New Zealand Fiction*' (47).

Despite the obvious interest in New Zealand authors that these five separate series showed, there had been no further full-length biographies published since those of Mansfield and Mackay in the 1950s. In January 1984 McEldowney summed up the situation in his rather wishfully titled 'Recent Literary Biography': 'At the time this is written ... no full-length serious biography of a writer who spent most of a lifetime in New Zealand has been published, although several are being written and at least one will appear this year' (47). There had been other kinds of literary biographies, such as McEldowney's own *Frank Sargeson in his Time* (1976), an illustrated 72-page essay, with the disclaimer in the acknowledgements: 'When the subject is engaged in writing his memoirs so brilliantly it would be foolish to try and rival them; and this is not on the scale of a full biography for which the time is not yet come. It is an outline narrative which largely concerns itself with the public Sargeson and the world he has inhabited' (68). In 1977 Erik Olssen's full-length biography *John A. Lee* was published, but owing to the nature of Lee's life this was biased towards his political rather than his literary accomplishments.

In 1981 a slim, non-scholarly, self-published volume surfaced, by Eileen Duggan's friend Grace Burgess: *A Gentle Poet: A Portrait of Eileen Duggan, O.B.E.* In 1983 two more photo-essays in the tradition of McEldowney's *Frank Sargeson in his Time* were published: W.H. Oliver's *James K. Baxter: A Portrait*, and *Walking on My Feet: A.R.D Fairburn 1904-1957: A Kind of Biography* by James and Helen MacNeish.

The 1980s also saw several serious literary biographies appear - full-length works devoted to the portrayal of a fully-rounded subject, focusing on their development as a writer, and not just an outline narrative concerned with the public world. The first of

these was Alpers' second attempt at writing a biography of Mansfield, published 27 years after his first. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980) is intended as a replacement rather than a companion to the first biography, as the size of the respective works indicate, and also the more authoritative nature of the second's title. Denys Trussell's *Fairburn* was published in 1984, and Lynley Hood's *Sylvia! The Biography of Sylvia Ashton-Warner* in 1988.

History Professor Miles Fairburn noted recently, at the presentation of Gordon Ogilvie's honorary doctorate from the University of Canterbury, that 'literary biography is possibly the best developed genre of non-fiction in New Zealand'.⁵ Fairburn was probably thinking of the many literary biographies that were published in the 1990s, including: Frank McKay's *The Life of James K. Baxter* (1990), Margaret Lewis' *Ngaio Marsh: A Life* (1991), Michael King's *Frank Sargeson: A Life* (1995), Keith Ovenden's *A Fighting Withdrawal: The Life and Times of Dan Davin* (1996), Julia Millen's *Ronald Hugh Morrieson: A Biography* (1996), Ian Richards' *To Bed At Noon: The Life and Times of Maurice Duggan* (1997), Rae McGregor's *The Story of a New Zealand Writer: Jane Mander* (1998), Janet Hunt's *Hone Tuwhare* (1998), and Gordon Ogilvie's *Denis Glover: His Life* (1999).

The most recent literary biography to be published is Michael King's *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame*, which appeared in August 2000. Subjects touted for forthcoming biographies include Robin Hyde (the research for this was begun by Gloria Rawlinson, and is now continued by Hyde's son Derek Challis), Charles Brasch (by Sarah Quigley), and R.A.K. Mason (by Rachael Barrowman).

What all this shows us is that literary autobiography and biography have developed side by side in New Zealand: both having forerunners in works of the 1950s and 1960s, and becoming significant literary genres in the period from the 1970s to the present day. However, there is relatively little criticism available on either, aside from the articles by Sinclair (1978), McEldowney (1984) and Geraets (1989), the section in Jones' collection of essays *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* (1987, 1990), a shorter version of

⁵ *Chronicle* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, January 2001), 8.

which was published in 1985,⁶ and the section of Gibbons' 'Non-Fiction' chapter in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (1998), to which I have referred above. *Biography in New Zealand* (1985), edited by Jock Phillips, is a collection of essays originally given as papers at a conference on that topic in 1984: comment on literary biography is confined to Alpers' chapter. Critical commentary exists on individual works, especially Frame's autobiography, but the genres of literary autobiography and biography remain largely uninvestigated at the present day.

II. The aims and procedures of this thesis.

Of the five literary autobiographers whom I have designated earlier as significant contributors to the genre of New Zealand literary autobiography (Sargeson, Ashton-Warner, Brasch, Frame, and Edmond) I have chosen to look at four in this thesis – Sargeson, Edmond, Ashton-Warner, and Frame – three of whom have had a biography written about them which may be usefully compared with their autobiography. Each of the autobiographies, I will argue, is a *spiritual* autobiography. (Part III of the introduction outlines the origins, history, and characteristic structures and epiphanic features of the spiritual autobiography.)

It will be noted that Brasch's autobiography has been omitted from this project. I have chosen to exclude it because of its heavily edited nature. Despite Bertram's insistence that he aimed to keep the integrity of Brasch's text, without examination of the original - which Bertram says had 'been in part revised by the author' (xi) - how certain can we be that Bertram saw the same structures and emphases in the text as Brasch, especially with half the content removed? The autobiography would, however, seem to fit the spiritual autobiographical model that I propose is a characteristic of New Zealand literary autobiography. Lawrence Jones comments in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* that '[t]he 'one story' that Brasch has to tell (brought out the more clearly, one suspects, by James Bertram's judicious editing) is, despite all the obvious differences, basically the

⁶ 'The One Story, the Two Ways of Telling, and the Three Perspectives', *Ariel* 16:4 (October 1985), 127-50.

same [as Sargeson's] (327), and spends three pages discussing the similarities between them, and Bertram says of the autobiography: 'This was intended to be ... a sort of prose *Prelude* or 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' (xi).

Above all, this is a poet's testament: the record of moments of insight and heightened sensibility, stirred by memorable sights and sensations, the appreciation of great works of art, and by casual or intimate friendships with men, women and children in many different lands. It was from such moments or 'epiphanies' that Charles Brasch made the poetry by which he is most likely to be remembered. ... [It also shows his] longer and more testing private struggle to assert and justify his poetic vocation than many of his fellow-writers.

Indirections is the candid and revealing account of the making of a New Zealand poet. As such, it is unique in our writing; only Frank Sargeson ... has attempted anything comparable. (xii-xiii)

Bertram's comments date from 1980, when *Indirections* was published. The primary aim of this thesis is to show that the autobiographies of Edmond, Ashton-Warner, and Frame also attempt something comparable; that it is a general tendency in New Zealand literary autobiography to use the narrative form or model of spiritual autobiography, usually (but not always) characterised by use of the modernist epiphany - which Bertram mentions in the above passage in relation to Brasch - as a major narrative device. I intend to show that each autobiography is a spiritual autobiography, but that each writer uses the basic model in a different way.

The second aim of this thesis is to elucidate these writers' reasons for writing spiritual autobiography. All four autobiographies are about the creation of the artist in the 'Provincial' period in New Zealand literature,⁷ a time when it was particularly difficult for one to stand up and proclaim oneself to be an artist in the face of repressive

⁷ In Lawrence's Jones chapter on 'The Novel' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* he gives the date for this period as 1935-64. Jones sees two generations of writers belonging to this period: 'the first born between 1900 and the First World War, the second mostly born in the 1920s' (152). He names Sargeson (b.1903) as belonging to the first, and Frame (b.1924) and Ashton-Warner (b.1908) to the second, the latter because she first published in the 1950s along with other writers of the 'second' Provincial generation. Edmond (b.1924) is also aligned with that generation although she did not publish until the mid-1970s.

puritan society and geographic isolation from the rest of the world. In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* Lawrence Jones writes:

For the writer of New Zealand literary autobiography 'There is one story only', although it may be expressed in various forms. ... The story, then, is that of the struggle of [the] artist to find a 'place' (often literal as well as figurative) in a hostile provincial environment, a story of defeat and persecution but also of victory in the achievement of art (even if the art succeeds only in holding up a mirror in which the society could see its unlovely self if it only chose to look). (313)

I will argue that the 'struggle' Jones speaks of mirrors the 'struggle' or crisis in spiritual autobiography, and is the primary reason why New Zealand literary autobiographers use this form. Also, however, there are more individual and personal reasons for each writer choosing to write spiritual autobiography. Each uses the model provided by the spiritual autobiography for different reasons.

In each of the three following chapters - focusing on Sargeson, Edmond and Ashton-Warner, and Frame, in that order - I will first identify how each autobiography is spiritual autobiography. After the identification stage, I will examine the reasons for each writer choosing to use this narrative form.

In Chapter 1, I discuss Frank Sargeson's autobiography. More than any of the other writers', Sargeson's autobiography is classic spiritual autobiography, as volume 1 ends with an epiphany in an orchard which is shown explicitly to be the determining moment for his subsequent devotion to writing. The spiritual crisis Sargeson experiences prior to this centres on the puritanism of New Zealand society which he simultaneously exposes and upholds in his fiction. The epiphany which he experiences also replaces an event which he wished to conceal in his life and his autobiography. Thus Sargeson uses a traditional autobiographical form, pre-sanctioned by writers such as James Joyce, as a way of eliding the biographical truth. Reading the autobiography through the lens of King's biography shows how he has reshaped and fictionalised events to fit the pattern of spiritual growth that he desires the reader to see.

In Chapter 2, I intend to discuss Lauris Edmond and Sylvia Ashton-Warner together, for two main reasons. First, compared to the canonical figures of Sargeson and Frame, Edmond and Ashton-Warner are more minor practitioners in the history of New Zealand literature. And secondly, gender plays a large role in the formation of both narratives. If it was difficult for men to be accepted as artists in the Provincial period, it was doubly difficult for women. Growing up female in postwar New Zealand society, a climate of very fixed social expectations towards the occupations of men and women, there are few roles open to Edmond, and it is only when she ‘discards’ the expected role of mother/wife that she is able to begin her writing career. Although Ashton-Warner publishes her first novel *Spinster* (1958) while she is a mother, wife, and primary school teacher, she, like Edmond, is restricted in how she adopts the role of ‘the artist’. Another female New Zealand writer and autobiographer, Ruth Dallas, will be introduced for a confirmation of how pervasive the social expectations upon women were: Janet Frame will also be discussed in this context.

Like Sargeson, Edmond uses the bipartite form of spiritual autobiography - structured around a life-changing epiphany - to represent what she describes as her ‘divided’ life. However, unlike Sargeson, Edmond parallels her post-epiphanic awareness of her lack of individuation with the rise of feminist consciousness worldwide: her life and experiences become symbolic of a generation’s.

Ashton-Warner also describes a moment of epiphany confirming her decision to become a writer. Yet unlike Edmond’s, and also Sargeson’s, her epiphany is not structurally significant because before this moment, as well as afterwards, she continues to identify as ‘the artist’. Her decision to become a writer is simply a moment where her artistic talents – for music and painting, as well as writing – are critically scrutinised, and narrowed down. Ashton-Warner is faced with the same problems as Edmond, yet she does not let her gender hinder her development as an artist, although struggling to perform roles of mother, wife, teacher, and artist does lead to a breakdown. Rather, the main struggle she confronts throughout, the crisis of her autobiography, is the struggle of being an artist in a philistine society.

The spiritual nature of Janet Frame’s autobiography, which I discuss in Chapter 3, is more complex than Sargeson’s, Edmond’s, or Ashton-Warner’s, which is why I have

left Frame until last in this discussion, although the obvious chronological sequence would be: Sargeson, Ashton-Warner, Frame, Edmond. There is no epiphany, for which I will suggest some reasons related to the impetus behind the writing of the autobiography. The spiritual crisis Frame faces is the crisis of being misdiagnosed as schizophrenic, and when this diagnosis is finally proven to have been erroneous, her identity as a writer is clear. Also, for Frame, the imaginative process – the process of creating literature – is in itself a spiritual experience. The Angel of the title of volume 2 of her autobiography becomes the Envoy of volume 3. The title of King's biography *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (which will be discussed in this chapter) tells of the simultaneous imaginative and spiritual struggle.

To sum up, what I intend to do in this thesis is to show how all four New Zealand writers produce autobiographies modelled after the spiritual autobiographical tradition, and examine their reasons for writing this kind of autobiography. Why is there a general tendency for twentieth-century New Zealand writers to write 'one story' based on the spiritual autobiography, a genre which has its roots in the Christian conversion narrative?

III. Spiritual autobiography: the epiphany.

The word 'autobiography' was used for the first time in 1809 by a reviewer, Robert Southey, but the beginnings of the genre are usually believed to date back to antiquity, with the rise of the Christian conversion narrative or spiritual autobiography. This narrative is structurally and thematically centred around the moment of conversion, which is often precipitated by a vision of God, or some kind of manifestation with God as its origin. For example, after years of deliberating, St. Augustine is finally converted in the *Confessions* (AD397-401) when he hears a child's voice chanting 'pick it up and read it' (or 'take it up and read', depending on the translation). Augustine believes he is being directed by God to open his bible, whereupon he reads a passage he identifies with, and is convinced that God is speaking directly to him.

Generally, autobiography historians agree that Augustine's *Confessions* was the first modern autobiography, although some believe otherwise.⁸ The climax of the work is Augustine's conversion, which ends book 8 of the *Confessions*. Because of Augustine's significance to the history of the spiritual autobiography, I want to discuss his conversion experience in detail here to illustrate the structural features of such a moment; the narrative model of the conversion.

The story begins with Augustine walking in a garden with his friend Alypius, in a state of 'extraordinary agitation'.⁹ Although Augustine wants to be able to devote himself to God, he feels he is not strong enough to adhere to God's laws, particularly those relating to sexual desire. He leaves Alypius and breaks down into tears.

The streams of my eyes broke forth, a sacrifice acceptable to you. I said to you, in words something like these: 'And you, O Lord, how long, how long? Will you be angry for ever? Remember not past iniquities.' For I felt I was in their grip and I cried out in lamentation: 'How long, how long, tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not an end to my vileness in this hour?'

Such were my words and I wept in the bitter contrition of my heart. And, see, I heard a voice from a neighbouring house chanting repeatedly, whether a boy's or a girl's voice I do not know: 'Pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it.' My countenance changed and with the utmost concentration I began to wonder whether there was any sort of game in which children commonly used such a chant, but I could not remember having heard one anywhere. Restraining a rush of tears, I got up, concluding that I was bidden of heaven to open the book and read the first chapter I should come upon. I had heard of Antonius that from a public reading of the gospel he had chanced upon, he had

⁸ There is a whole corpus of discussion on this issue, for which this is not the place. Briefly, some commentators, like Peter Brown, believe that '[p]agan philosophers had already created a tradition of "religious autobiography" ... [which was] continued by Christians in the fourth century, and ... reach[ed] its climax in the *Confessions*' (*Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* [London: Faber, 1967], 159). Others dispute this lineage, claiming that it was a wholly original work. For example, Roy Pascal writes: '[i]ts novelty is so astonishing that there is considerable argument about its sources. The customary view that it arose from the Christian concern for the soul and habit of confession leaves much unexplained' (*Design and Truth in Autobiography* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960], 22). Yet other critics argue that autobiography as a genre was not established until the eighteenth century. This disparity of opinion is unsurprising when it is considered that commentators about autobiography have great difficulty even agreeing on a definition of the genre. For example, George May sees it as something too complex to contain under a genre label: for him, autobiography is a 'literary attitude' ('Autobiography and the Eighteenth Century', *The Author and his Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, eds. Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams [New Haven: Yale UP, 1978], 320).

⁹ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E.M. Blaiklock (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 203.

been commanded as if what was read was said especially to him: 'Go, sell all that which you have, give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me', and that by such a word from God, he had been immediately converted to you. Excitedly then I went back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle's book when I got up. I seized it, opened it and immediately read in silence the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: '... not in the ways of banqueting and drunkenness, in immoral living and sensualities, passion and rivalry, but to glut the body's lusts ...'. I did not want to read on. There was no need. Instantly at the end of this sentence, as if a light of confidence had been poured into my heart, all the darkness of my doubt fled away.¹⁰

Augustine's experience follows a certain form or structure. At the beginning, he is in a state of mental torment or crisis relating to the purpose of his life. In the midst of this turmoil he hears a voice which he interprets as God instructing him to open his bible: he has perceived God's voice to be manifested in the chanting of the children next door. The chapter he reads neatly addresses his particular predicament, and because of this appropriateness he is immediately convinced that God is speaking directly to him, and is finally able to convert. Thus, in the scene in the garden Augustine goes through the following stages: first crisis, then manifestation, then a final stage that we may describe as revelation or resolution.

The conversion experience is one of the structures found within the spiritual autobiography: one of its inherent narrative features. There is also another, larger, structure around which the entire narrative is based: a bipartite writing of the self represented before and after conversion. For example, Augustine is writing from a

¹⁰ p.203-04. The concept of receiving guidance via the random opening of the bible is of course a tradition larger than Augustine. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Glasgow: Collins, 1992) William James quotes an example of one person's conversion experience which contains such an incident: 'seeing part of an old Bible lying in one of the chairs, [he] caught hold of it in great haste; and opening it without any premeditation, cast [his] eyes on the 38th Psalm, which was the first time [he] ever saw the word of God: it took hold of [him] with such power that it seemed to go through [his] whole soul, so that it seemed as if God was praying in, with, and for [him]' (220). In *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1983) Avrom Fleishman calls such devices 'figures of autobiography: these literary formulas, motifs, and conventions that shape writing about the self. Augustine's conversion scene in the garden at Milan, for instance, uses four figures from ancient literary tradition: 'the sudden apparition (in this case a voice), as found in African "vision" literature; the admonition by a children's game, as in a host of classical didactic works; the *sortes*, or opening at random, practiced on a variety of privileged texts in both the Jewish and pagan as well as Christian culture; and the formula "Take and read," widely used to encourage scholars in both Christian and pagan writings' (54).

position of conversion, which means that there are two selves being written about, or formed, in the text: past self (sinner) and present self (enlightened and repentant Christian). Spiritual autobiography is bipartite. In order to differentiate the 'who I was then' from the 'who I am now', there must be a discrete splitting of the self in the narrative.

One reason for this is that originally spiritual autobiography was written to encourage readers to convert by inducing them to identify with the former self and thus, subsequently, to convert as the author has done: there is a narrative strategy behind Augustine's writing. Another is that it is a structural given. When a person converts to a religious belief, their whole life becomes couched in terms of before and after. This is the narrative progression which is common to spiritual autobiography.

This pattern of experience, this traditional narrative structure, may be found in works extending to the present day that revolve around a religious conversion: for example, John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) in the seventeenth century, and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcom X as told to Alex Haley* (1992) in the twentieth century.¹¹ However, the term 'spiritual autobiography' has become a wider term which may be used to refer to any autobiography in which there is some kind of crisis, or revelation; an epiphany - *not necessarily religious* - which has a substantial, life-changing effect on the protagonist who experiences it. Often, these are literary autobiographies in which the crisis is one of vocation and is resolved by the subject's realisation that they were meant to be an artist, such as James Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), or William Wordsworth's epic poem *The Prelude* (1850).¹² In a sense these do record conversion experiences, if it is possible to speak of conversions to Art.

¹¹ In this instance the protagonist (then Malcom Little) converts to the Black Muslim teachings of Elijah Muhammad after seeing a manifestation of Muhammad in his prison cell. His new identity is represented in his name change. *Malcolm X* is classic spiritual autobiography in that the life of the subject is clearly divided into two parts: before and after conversion. He states: 'every minister in the Nation ... came to the conviction that it was written that all of his 'before' life had been only conditioning and preparation to become a disciple of Mr Muhammad's' (London: Penguin, 1992, 310). However, the autobiography is unusual in that the converted self is not represented as fixed. A second conversion occurs when Malcom X rejects Muhammad, takes a pilgrimage to Mecca, and converts to Islam.

¹² In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1999) Abrams describes this type of literary autobiography as 'an important offshoot' of the spiritual autobiography (23). Examples he gives aside from *The Prelude* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* include Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1965). Abrams also describes Joyce's novel

So, to sum up, some literary autobiographies follow the narrative model of the spiritual autobiography. The conversion of the Christian narrative is replaced with a secular epiphany which results in the protagonist's realisation of their identity as an artist. And the larger structural model of the spiritual autobiography is also retained in a bipartite division of the subject's life before and after this moment of experience.

The word 'epiphany', uncapitalised, means 'any manifestation of a god or demigod'. (When it is capitalised, it may refer either to 'the manifestation of Christ to the Magi according to the biblical account', or 'the festival commemorating this on 6 January'.)¹³ Augustine experiences an epiphany when he perceives God's instructions manifested in the child's voice next door. The word derives from the Greek root *phainein*, meaning 'to show', 'to bring light', or 'cause to appear'. It describes a literal illumination. When the prefix *epi* is added, it becomes *epiphainein*, 'to manifest'. The noun, *epiphaneia*, is 'manifestation'.¹⁴

In the twentieth century, the meaning of the word 'epiphany' has undergone a change which brings it closer to its literal Greek origins than ever. No longer denoting a divine manifestation, it has become a more secular concept, found often in literature, and meaning any kind of 'manifestation' or 'showing forth'.¹⁵ In other words, its religious significance has been removed, while still denoting some kind of manifestation from an ordinary object; an elevation of the mundane, from which some sort of revelation is experienced. It was Joyce who 'adapted the term to secular experience'¹⁶ in *Stephen Hero* (1944), an early draft of *A Portrait* which was published posthumously. A trivial incident – overhearing scraps of a young couple's conversation – leads Stephen to 'think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies' (211). Here the narrator becomes explicit.

as a subtype of the Bildungsroman ('novel of education'); the Künstlerroman ('artist-novel'), which 'represents the growth of a novelist or other artist from childhood into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft' (193).

¹³ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990), 394.

¹⁴ From Ashton Nichols's account in *The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth Century Origins of the Modern Literary Movement* (Alabama: Alabama UP, 1987), 5.

¹⁵ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 80-81.

¹⁶ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 80. Abrams also tells us in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) that Joyce 'quickly gave up using the name, [although] he clearly used the thing as an important element in his later writings' (422).

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.

Following Joyce's use of the word, '[e]piphany has become the standard term for the description, frequent in modern poetry and prose fiction, of the sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene'.¹⁷

However, such intense revelatory moments stemming from everyday experiences existed in English literature prior to Joyce. They are found in the romantic period: 'Many Romantic writers testified to a deeply significant experience in which an instant of consciousness, or else an ordinary object or event, suddenly blazes into revelation'.¹⁸ One reason for this is that the notion of highlighting moments in which the emotions of an individual are especially intense appealed to the romantic sensibility which valued feeling above all; also, it allowed revelation to come from Nature instead of God. In *Natural Supernaturalism* Abrams refers to these instances as 'Moments'. Wordsworth is the most prominent exponent of such moments, *The Prelude* being structured around 'spots of time' – an apt description of the moment because they seem to those who experience them to last much longer than their actual temporal length, as if time has paused for the duration of the moment, or ceased to exist. Other Victorian poets had different names for Wordsworth's 'spots of time': for example, Browning's 'infinite moment' and Tennyson's and Shelley's 'trances'.¹⁹ Usually these moments were secular in origin.²⁰

For the modernists, the representation of such moments was their reason for writing. All the most important writers make mention of these moments, whether in their fiction or other writings. Abrams sums up some of their phrases:

¹⁷ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 81.

¹⁸ *Natural Supernaturalism*, 385.

¹⁹ *The Poetics of Epiphany*, xi-xii.

We recognize the familiar traits not only in Proust's *moments privileges*, but also in Henry James's act of imagination which "converts the very pulses of the air into revelations"; in Joseph Conrad's "moment of vision" that reveals "all the truth of life"; in Virginia Woolf's "moments of vision", the "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark"; in Thomas Wolfe's attempt "to fix eternally ... a single moment of man's living ... that passes, flames and goes"; in William Faulkner's "instant of sublimation ... a flash, a glare."²¹

There are many reasons why the epiphany was so valuable to the modernists, whose work is characterised by attempts to represent as inherent the bleak, isolated situation of the modern individual. The protagonists of modern fiction are often inward-looking (hence the development of stream-of-consciousness narration in this period; the characteristic of inwardness being related also to modern developments in the field of psychology) and of intense sensibility, wondering if their experience of the world is ever the same as anybody else's. Also, there can be no ultimate meaning in a secular world, and as a result all there is is the individual experience of everyday life. The epiphany works well with the modernist mindset, as it did the romantic, because it posits the idea that mysterious and inexplicable revelation is still possible in a world where the ultimate signifier (God) has been removed. Morris Beja points out that 'the literary epiphany is now usually represented so as to seem irreligious, and occasionally even antireligious,' adding that 'it is, as well, almost invariably seen as irrational, and very often even antirational.'²² The modernist epiphany occurs from ordinary, everyday things, and usually to sensitive, artistic individuals, which the modernist protagonists often are, representative of how their creators perceived themselves to be, like Joyce's semi-autobiographical Stephen Dedalus or the female protagonists of Katherine Mansfield's short stories.

What I want to do now is to illustrate exactly how closely the epiphany in modernist literature follows the narrative structure of the conversion of the spiritual autobiography, by comparing epiphanies in the fiction of Joyce and Mansfield with

²⁰ Gerald Manley Hopkins is one example of a nineteenth-century poet who retained his faith and whose 'moments', correspondingly, always have God as their origin.

²¹ *Natural Supernaturalism*, 419.

²² *Epiphany in the Modern Novel: Revelation as Art* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), 21.

Augustine's conversion experience. As well as being from New Zealand originally, Mansfield is particularly known for the 'moments of being' which her characters experience, while Joyce, the most influential modernist writer, also centred his early fiction around epiphanies, especially his short story collection *Dubliners* (1914), and his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The latter has also been very influential on the development of the literary autobiography in New Zealand. In *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Patrick Evans describes it as 'a work which spoke to New Zealand writers from a predicament common to all provincials caught between an inhospitable local reality and an urge towards Europe that made the here-and-now so much more difficult to accept' (185-86). This feeling of being out-of-place, of being apart from immediate society, is part of the reason why New Zealand literary autobiographers write 'one story' which is the story of the struggle to exist as an artist in a hostile society, with Art simultaneously being the ultimate sanction for their struggle.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is, strictly, a semi-autobiographical novel (it is not, after all, about the development of Joyce from earliest childhood to fully-fledged artist, but the story of the artistic development of his protagonist Stephen Dedalus), yet it follows the narrative forms of the spiritual autobiography. The end of Chapter 4, where Stephen realises that his destiny lies as an artist, follows the same narrative pattern as Augustine's conversion. I want to examine this scene to show how the Christian conversion narrative has been adopted by the literary autobiography.

Whereas Augustine was in a garden, Stephen is walking near the sea. He is, however, in a state of crisis analogous to Augustine's, as it is related to the purpose of his life. Stephen has decided not to become a priest but does not fully understand why. 'All through his boyhood he had mused upon that which he had so often thought to be his destiny and when the moment had come for him to obey the call he had turned aside, obeying a wayward instinct.... He had refused. Why?'²³ He passes '[a] squad of christian brothers' on a bridge, symbolic of the vocation he has just unexpectedly decided against. He can see the city in the distance, which disheartens him, and he looks up to the clouds. All of a sudden he hears this:

²³ Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, 170.

a confused music within him as of memories and names which he was almost conscious of but could not capture even for an instant; then the music seemed to recede, to recede, to recede: and from each receding trail of nebulous music there fell always one long-drawn calling note, piercing like a star the dusk of silence.... A voice from beyond the world was calling. (172)

This is not, however, a divine voice about to respond to his question 'Why?', as Augustine perceives God to have instructed him in the garden. Stephen has merely come across some of his friends, who are horsing around in the water and calling out to him. They continue to joke about with his surname, and,

as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy. So timeless seemed the grey warm air, so fluid and impersonal his own mood, that all ages were as one to him. A moment before the ghost of the ancient kingdom of the Danes had looked forth through the vesture of the hazewrapped city. Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it ... a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (173-74)

Instead of a vision of God, Stephen has 'seemed' to have had a vision of Daedalus, the inventor from Greek mythology who created wings enabling man to fly. The image of Daedalus forging a being out of the earth may be seen however as being analogous to God creating man; the difference being, as Stephen points out, that the being Daedalus creates is superior because it is immortal. Art is greater than God, and therefore worthy of replacing Stephen's religious destiny.

Stephen has received 'the call of life to his soul'. The reason why he refused to be ordained has come to him: 'He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul'. He was meant, it seems, to become an artist, to adopt the vocation of his namesake.

In this state of agitation, just as Augustine was 'agitated' in the garden, Stephen perceives a manifestation which has divine connotations. Coming to a place where others are wading, he sees a beautiful girl 'like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird' (176). His vision of Daedalus was something he *seemed* to see: the girl is real, if altered or *manifested* in his eyes to be something else, just as the voices of his classmates calling to him became the voice of something from beyond. He 'worship[s]' the girl with his eyes, until: '—Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy.' He turns and strides along the beach, thinking of the 'wild angel [who] had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory' (176-77). As if overcome, he sleeps, and wakes at evening.

The end of Chapter 4 of *A Portrait* may be seen to follow the same structure as Augustine's conversion. Stephen experiences crisis, followed by a manifestation (girl as bird/angel) which seems to be a confirmation of his decision to become an artist. Again, we see the tripartite structure of crisis, manifestation, resolution/revelation. It is an intensely spiritual moment – Joyce creates this effect by drawing on the Christian tradition, retaining biblical language and iconography (the winged form of Daedalus, representing the artist, is visually identical to a winged angel, a representative of the original artist or creator, God; Stephen thinks the vision of Daedalus may have been a 'prophecy'; as a result of the experience he feels 'ecstasy', a word often used to describe religious rapture; he uses the phrase 'a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward' (174), reminiscent of the passage 'the spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water' [Gen. 1:2], for Stephen is standing beside the water, and Stephen is in a sense equating himself to God by deciding to become an artist, a creator; the bird-imagery that describes the girl links her with the Holy Spirit) – but it is a 'reverse', modernist conversion, because Stephen is converted not to God but to Art.

Epiphanies or 'moments of being' also feature prominently in Mansfield's short stories. Mansfield is often associated with the 'slice-of-life' school of short story writing, after Chekhov's influence. In her story 'Prelude' (1920) – the title may be read as a direct allusion to Wordsworth - an aloe tree in the garden causes a revelation for Linda

Burnell. One could say that the aloe tree is symbolic of something else; also, that while looking at it, Linda experiences an epiphany. The difference however is that symbolism replaces one object with another: cigar for phallus, water for rebirth, the unconscious, the mother etc, and so on. It allows the author to add depth and detail to the story without the intrusion of authorial explanation, and as such is an important component of the ‘show, don’t tell’ mindset of the Chekhov-influenced new generation of short story writers. By contrast, epiphany involves some kind of manifestation which results in revelation. I want to discuss the epiphany in Mansfield’s story to confirm its structural similarities to Joyce’s, which may be traced back to the conversion of the Christian narrative.

Earlier in ‘Prelude’ the aloe is described with distinctly phallic imagery:

Linda looked up at the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem. High above them, as though becalmed in the air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it might have had claws instead of roots. The curving leaves seemed to be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it.²⁴

However, the next time Linda looks at the aloe it is feminine rather than masculine: “‘Don’t you feel that it is coming towards us?’” says Linda to her mother ‘with the special voice that women use at night to each other’ (53). Now she sees it as an image of sanctuary, ‘a ship with the oars lifted’ offering her a means of escape. ‘She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast.... They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: ‘Faster! Faster!’ to those who were rowing.’

Linda tells her mother that she ‘like[s] [the aloe] more than anything here’, and they walk closer to it. From this perspective Linda can see ‘the long sharp thorns that edged the aloe leaves, and at the sight of them her heart grew hard. . . . She particularly liked the long sharp thorns. . . . Nobody would dare to come near the ship or to follow after’. The ‘[n]obody’ Linda is afraid of is her husband Stanley, whom she refers to condescendingly as her ‘Newfoundland dog’. In particular, Linda is afraid of having sex with Stanley, because of its painful result in childbirth. Sexual relations with her husband

²⁴ *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Penguin, 1981), 34.

are described as death, even murder. 'There were times when he was frightening—really frightening. When she just had not screamed at the top of her voice: "You are killing me." And at those times she had longed to say the most coarse, hateful things' (54).

Rather than a representation of threatening male sexuality, the aloe manifested as a ship represents sanctuary or refuge: specifically, refuge from Stanley. And after the manifestation, in the usual pattern of epiphany, the revelation comes:

Yes, yes, it was true. Linda snatched her hand from mother's arm. For all her love and respect and admiration she hated him

It had never been so plain to her as it was at this moment. There were all her feelings for him, sharp and defined, one as true as the other. And there was this other, this hatred, just as real as the rest [my emphasis].

The revelation that she hates her husband takes away Linda's fear of Stanley, sex, and childbirth. She can now laugh at herself, at her 'mania' to 'keep alive at all', because she can now see 'how absurd life was—it was laughable, simply laughable.' The experience releases her: 'I shall go on having children and Stanley will go on making money and the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from'.

The epiphany which Linda experiences is not as spiritual as Stephen's, for Mansfield's fiction does not have the same preoccupation as Joyce's with religion, different themes informing her writing. Nonetheless, there are thematic similarities between the two scenes. The vision of the aloe as a ship offers Linda an escape from the 'cold water' or her present situation, in which she lives in fear of her husband at the same time as she despises him. Pre-epiphany, Stephen was also afraid of the water ('his flesh dreaded the cold inhuman odour of the sea' [172]). The thorns on the aloe may be read as analogous to the thorns which crowned Christ on the cross, and Linda as a martyr, suffering her husband's actions in silence, just as many other women in Mansfield's stories are martyrs to the men in their lives.²⁵ As Stephen becomes God in a sense, so

²⁵ For example, Constantia and Josephine in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' have spent their lives ministering to their late father. Constantia remembers a time she 'crept out of bed in her night-gown when

does Linda become a kind of Christ-figure. Once she realises that she hates Stanley, she loses her fear, just as Stephen is released from 'the fear he had walked in night and day, ... [and] the shame that had abased him within and without' (174). Both epiphanies are also linked to sex, or physical desire (Stanley, the girl in the water).

More importantly, for my purposes, the two scenes have the same narrative structure. There is a beginning, which introduces some kind of crisis or tension in the protagonist. This is usually a culmination of all that has gone before, be it for three-quarters of a novel, or a few pages of a short story. Stephen's epiphany responds to the 'why?' he asked himself earlier: it is also due to his Catholic upbringing. Linda's phallic vision of the aloe comes from her fear of sex and childbirth. Next, there is a middle stage: the epiphany itself, the 'sudden spiritual manifestation', which may involve some kind of magical physical transformation or manifestation (girl as bird or angel, aloe as ship). Finally, there is an ending: the revelation that the epiphany has brought about in the protagonist. This revelation usually results in a significant change in the character's attitude to their life. Stephen believes it is his destiny to become an artist, while Linda loses her fear of Stanley.

Crisis, manifestation, revelation or resolution. These are the stages that Augustine went through in his conversion experience, the difference being that he was a real historical figure, not a fictional character, but also that the manifestation that Augustine experiences (the voice chanting) he takes to be an instruction from God. Literary epiphany is secular, and external. It does not come about through God's agency, nor does it result in conversion to God. It is not religious so much as psychological in that it is concerned with a revelation of the self. It is an archetype of self-discovery, or awakening.

The ability to demonstrate change, or transformation, in the personality, aims, or values of a particular individual is one reason why the epiphany, common to modernist fiction, is often found in spiritual autobiography. An epiphanic experience provides an authentic reason for a character to grow, or develop; showing self-knowledge, it also asserts as fundamental the unity of self that is essential to both autobiography and

the moon was full, and [had] lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified' (284), an image which connects her to Christ.

biography, which is an aspect of both genres that twentieth-century writers on psychology and literary theory have sought to undermine.²⁶ John Barbour writes:

The classic religious [spiritual] autobiography – the one which continues to fascinate a variety of readers – speaks both to those whose faith and hope lies in stability of character and to those whose optimism depends on the possibility of basic transformations of character. Such an autobiography appeals strongly to the Western religious consciousness – to our deep desire for an integrated self, based on the ideal of the unified individual and the Jewish and Christian idea of the soul.²⁷

Some commentators, like Elizabeth de Mijolla, argue that the moment of epiphany disrupts the mimetic (imitating life) aim of autobiography by disrupting the time scale of the narrative: ‘The exceptional moment may exceed its place in the tale.... Thus the truth of the moment disrupts the truth of the tale; thus memory deconstructs mimesis.’²⁸ The epiphany does disrupt the time scale of the narrative: in telling, it takes up much more time that it may have done in actual historical experience, where it may have only lasted for a second. However, this emphasises the significance of the moment for the protagonist, to whom it may have seemed to last much longer. Northrop Frye uses the word ‘*kairos*’ to describe such a ‘sudden critical widening of the present moment’. According to Frye, in such a moment ‘[o]ne has glimpses of the immense foreshortening of time that can take place in the world of the spirit; we may speak of ‘inspiration’, a word that can hardly mean anything except the coming or breaking through of the spirit from a world beyond time’.²⁹

In the following chapters I intend to show that Sargeson, Edmond, Ashton-Warner, and Frame all write literary autobiography that follows the form of the spiritual

²⁶ Especially the school of Deconstructionism; writers like Lacan and Nietzsche believe the idea of an autonomous individual soul that transcends the limits of language is a fallacy.

²⁷ *The Conscience of the Autobiographer: Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Autobiography* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), 57.

²⁸ *Autobiographical Quests: Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, and Wordsworth* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1994), 8-9.

²⁹ *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981), 55.

autobiography. The first three writers all describe an obviously epiphanic moment, which is why I have devoted so much space here to the nature of epiphany – usually, the determining aspect of the spiritual autobiography - and in particular, its structural features. Thematic as well as structural similarities to Joyce's epiphany will also be seen, unsurprisingly, because of the close relationship of the subject matter, of the provincial writer isolated geographically and intellectually. Frame, however, writes a spiritual autobiography which features a more complex epiphanic experience, and the reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 1:

The making of Frank Sargeson (and the hiding of Norris Davey).

I. Sargeson as pilgrim.

John Bunyan's autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) is an example of a spiritual autobiography following in the tradition of Augustine's *Confessions*, or the conversion narrative. James Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is an example of a work that follows the form of spiritual autobiography, with the moment of conversion being replaced – in a moment of epiphany - by the discovery of the protagonist's vocation as an artist. Frank Sargeson's autobiography *Sargeson* (1981) is an example of a literary autobiography that also takes this form, and there are in fact many similarities between the two works. Unlike Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's novel, Sargeson's protagonist – Sargeson's younger self - does not have to make a choice between religion and literature in the sense that Stephen decides to become an artist instead of a priest. However, as they are for modernist writers in general, the two things are closely linked for Sargeson as it is through the medium of literature (or language) that his spiritual quest for meaning, or the purpose of his life, will be undertaken. Further connections are made between literature and religion throughout Sargeson's autobiography. Two important factors are involved in this relationship: the power of the imagination, and the New Zealand environment. The final, cumulative epiphany of *Once is Enough*, which results in Sargeson deciding at last on his vocation as a writer, parallels the moment of conversion in traditional spiritual autobiography and draws all these themes together.

Of the three volumes that comprise *Sargeson*, *Once is Enough* is the most unified as spiritual autobiography in itself, and hence will figure most prominently in this

discussion.¹ It is in this volume that Sargeson sets up the connections between literature and spirituality that inform the second and third volumes of the autobiography, and it is at the end of the volume that Sargeson comes to the decision, in a moment of epiphany like Stephen Dedalus' in Joyce's *Portrait*, that he will become a writer. It is unsurprising that comparison is so readily made to Joyce, because of the subject matter: *Once is Enough* is Sargeson's portrait of the colonial artist as a young man, and in it Joyce is specifically mentioned as a literary influence:

I had read and admired Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, and supposed in my ignorance that everything in the book had happened in the author's life ... I supposed that anybody with a good memory might write a book equally as good as the one by James Joyce, so instead of reading at the Museum library I sat in the isolation of my room in a Bloomsbury lodging house writing the opening chapter of my *Portrait*. (114; my italics)

The intertextuality fixes Sargeson in the spiritual autobiographical tradition, which includes Wordsworth: the title of the first part of *Once is Enough*, 'Up Onto the Roof and Down Again', in which Sargeson returns to the landscape associated with his childhood, is reminiscent of what Abrams describes as 'the literal *rite de passage* in *The Prelude* ... when "on the roof / Of an itinerant Vehicle" the naive country boy for the first time crosses the "threshold" into London, and so into adult experience'.² There are numerous references to writers and other works of literature in Sargeson's autobiography: often, the style of different authors is evident in different passages. Because of this, it is logical to assume that Sargeson was aware of his literary antecedents when he was writing his portrait of the artist as a young man. It is not coincidence that there are references to Joyce, as well as many other writers: Sargeson is self-consciously foregrounding his autobiography's influences, self-consciously using the form of spiritual autobiography.

John Bunyan is another such influence. *Sargeson* contains no mention of Bunyan's autobiography, but there are many references to his *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

¹ Thus, in this chapter I will refer to the 3 volumes of autobiography (*Once is Enough: A Memoir* [1973], *More Than Enough: A Memoir* [1975], and *Never Enough! Places and People Mainly* [1977]) individually, rather than to the collected autobiography (*Sargeson*).

² *Natural Supernaturalism*, 388.

Sargeson's biographer Michael King tells us that from a young age Sargeson 'had his own copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*, to which he had been introduced at Sunday School',³ and in his adolescence Sargeson was strongly influenced by the story (as well as the Bible and theological literature).⁴ *Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory of the Christian life, and a spiritual autobiography in that it charts the spiritual journey of a pilgrim named Christian. However, rather than being structured around spiritual crisis and conversion, it records an ongoing process towards spiritual fulfilment.

Several times in the autobiography, Sargeson directly identifies with Bunyan's pilgrim. In *Once is Enough* he reveals: 'I was always secretly conscious of seeing myself as Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* whenever I climbed [the mountain] Te Aroha. It was a fancy that would always suggest itself to me very strongly when I was entering the bush about a third of the way up the mountain-side' (14; my italics). Later, while staying at his uncle's King Country farm, he refers again to his 'pilgrim's role', saying: 'I don't remember it bothered me at all that my uncle's kitchen could hardly be said to resemble either the heaven that Bunyan's hero achieved, or that private heaven I had established for myself on the Te Aroha mountain-top' (45). These episodes of identification with Christian, which occurred in the past, are recalled when the mature Sargeson is undertaking his own pilgrimage in the present: a pilgrimage to 'take a look at [his] New Zealand' (21). This journey is reflected in the prepositional phrases and the ascent/descent narrative form of 'Up Onto the Roof and Down Again', the roof in this case being the King Country landscape of his childhood.

Sargeson's journey in the present is not based on religious faith, as Christian's is, but it is spiritual in the sense that the landscape which Sargeson identifies as 'his' – the area around the King Country farm which used to be his maternal uncle's – has a special meaning for him. In addition, the young Sargeson is on a search for meaning that parallels the religious quest. He describes reading so avidly 'that the words on the

³ *Frank Sargeson: A Life* (1995), 19 note 33. King also quotes Sargeson writing of Janet Frame: 'How like Bunyan and *Pilgrim's Progress* it all is . . . Bunyan could feel himself backed by the Christian tradition, so was not entirely alone in his wrestling with Apollyon and what have you. But poor Janet stands for the solitary modern soul depending entirely upon personal resources when confronted by chaos' (332). By inviting comparison between his younger self and Bunyan's pilgrim, Sargeson is, like Bunyan, backing his writing with a tradition.

⁴ The extent of Bunyan's influence can be seen by Sargeson's use of the allusion *I Saw in My Dream* for the title of his first novel in 1949.

printed page seemed like irritating obstructions designed to conceal what [he] was searching for' (24). In his uncle's orchard he strains to hear 'the elusive indefinable sounds which the hypersensitive ear might detect, and which might miraculously turn out to be clues to the meaning and purpose of all things' (72), and later he describes an incident in a pub, where a drunk speaks of Keats, as 'just another among many ... from which [he] would frequently find [himself] trying to extract some sort of meaning' (118).

Sargeson's quest is not a physical or geographical one in the Arthurian sense of the term. He specifically tells us how the quest is to be undertaken: through reading, listening, and study of writers and poets; in other words, *through* words, through *language*. Sargeson's desire to find meaning through language is typical of literary modernism, of the tradition to which Joyce belongs, and in which the epiphany plays a central part. As I discussed in the introduction, many modernists aimed to represent in their fiction the sudden revelations and understandings that break one's contemplation of the quotidian and illuminate the meaning (or truth, or beauty) in people's lives. Sargeson's pilgrimage is a modernist journey towards meaning that can only be found in language. The quest will end with an epiphany which affirms Sargeson's decision to become a full-time writer: in other words, to devote his life to language and literature.

His modernist reverence for literature, for the 'Heritage' of which he himself enters in the act of writing his own books, comes through in the many literary references throughout *Sargeson*. It is Bunyan, however, who leaves a lasting impression, especially in relation to journeys that Sargeson undertakes throughout his life. In *Never Enough* he states explicitly: 'I was very familiar with, and indeed still loved to read *The Pilgrim's Progress*', and he quotes directly from it to describe a moment from his travels when he sees land stripped of forest, the result of kauri gum mining.

[N]ow I remembered — 'they took (Ignorance) up and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill and put him in there. Then I saw there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction . . .'. (23)

Driving through the South Island landscape for the first time Sargeson again likens his journey to the journey of Bunyan's fable: 'confronted with such a landscape how natural

for me to think in Scriptural terms: it was as though I had suddenly found myself in Bunyan country'.⁵ By frequently alluding to Bunyan, Sargeson is emphasising to the reader that he, like Bunyan's Christian, is on a journey in search of meaning. His quest may not be a *religious* one, which will end in a decision (like Augustine's) to spend the rest of his life serving God, but it is a quest for meaning, which will be undertaken through the medium of language and words. In referencing Bunyan, the autobiography self-consciously takes on a spiritual dimension, and also draws a very modernist correlation between literature and meaning.⁶

II. Religion, literature, and the role of the imagination.

Once is Enough is spiritual autobiography because it is structurally and thematically akin to the narrative form of that type of autobiography. By identifying the young Sargeson with Bunyan's pilgrim, the narrative becomes concerned with a search for meaning, which will be resolved in a typically modernist epiphany. Spirituality is also a major theme in the autobiography as Sargeson establishes a connection between spirituality and the imagination which parallels the modernist correlation between language and meaning.

⁵ *Never Enough*, 73. A connection may be drawn between what Sargeson says about the South Island hills and the 'South Island myth' found in the New Zealand male poetic tradition, especially the work of Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, and Charles Brasch. The hills have a similar significance for these writers as they do for Sargeson. The South Island myth values the country above the city, the farmer above the lawyer, and the past over the present. Glover's characters Harry (in the sequence *Sings Harry* [1951]) and Arawata Bill (from *Arawata Bill* [1953]) are both old-timers, connected to the hills. There is no particular material source for the value of the hills, unlike the guarded mauri in Keri Hulme's *the bone people* (1983), for example. Lawrence Jones' article "New Zealand As It Might Worthily Have Been": Frank Sargeson and the "Pilgrim Dream" examines Sargeson's use of the pilgrim metaphor in the wider context of New Zealand literature, pointing out that Sargeson's 'pilgrim dream' (the phrase comes from Curnow's 1941 poem 'The Unhistoric Story' ['The pilgrim dream pricked by a cold dawn died']), which revolves around the discrepancy between New Zealand 'as it is' and 'as it might worthily have been' (as Sargeson states on p.48 of *Once is Enough*), is a 'recurrent theme in New Zealand literature' (*Journal of New Zealand Literature* 1 [1983], 87). Jones aligns these two opposing positions with the dichotomy of the Creation/Rules illustration of the artist's place in society which Sargeson describes in *Never Enough* (see 35-36 below).

⁶ De Mijolla makes an obvious but important point concerning the difference between the protagonists' journeys in Augustine's *Confessions* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in *Autobiographical Quests*, 3. While Bunyan's pilgrim's path is linear ('the autobiographer [advances] steadily through spiritual traps and riches'), Augustine's journey is circular ('from birth to misled maturity to spiritual rebirth'). Although Sargeson is likening the progress of his younger self to that of Bunyan's Christian, because his path ends in rebirth (the epiphany in the orchard) his journey is structurally more akin to Augustine's.

In *Once is Enough* Sargeson comments on the influence that his adolescent reading of literature such as *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible had on him.

I was held in a web of my own making, a sort of tough moral fabric for the greater part woven from the numerous threads I had spun from my adolescent habit of reading the Gospels, *and the strong Protestant tendency of my own mind to interpret them privately* [65; my emphasis].

By emphasising his Protestant tendency towards private interpretation of the Gospels, Sargeson is foregrounding the role that subjectivity can play in the interpretation of religious texts. In both succeeding volumes of the autobiography, Sargeson emphasises the subjectivity of his approach to Christianity. In *More Than Enough* he says that:

in times of emotional crisis I tend involuntarily to revert to the Christian notions which had so much influenced me during the time of adolescence, *and which I would afterwards slant according to what seemed to me temperamental necessities* [134; my emphasis].

And in *Never Enough* he self-consciously repeats the phrase virtually word for word on the death of Harry: 'Already I have said that an emotional crisis willy-nilly revives in me the highly subjective version of the Christian religion which had been so important to me in my time of adolescence' (122).

Sargeson's repeated insistence on the subjectivity of his interpretations of Christian literature needs examining. By emphasising the subjectivity of his approach he is foregrounding the role that personal interpretation, or imagination, plays in reading the bible, or indeed, in religion as a whole. This concept is not new. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James writes: 'The more concrete objects of most men's religion, the deities whom they worship, are known to them only in idea' (69). Without a visible external presence, one must *imagine* that there is a God in order to believe in God. Northrop Frye in *The Double Vision* sees the Bible as a system of myth and metaphor: it is not meant to be read literally, nor for historical fact. Thus imagination is a basic

component of religious belief, just as it is a basic component in creating literature and responding to literature.

Sargeson is making modernist connections between religion or spirituality, and literature, through the medium of the imagination, which engages with both. More connections between literature and religion may be found in the autobiography, such as Sargeson's comment in *Never Enough* on the crisis of Harry's death. For the first time, he says 'it was a different kind of Scripture [he] looked to' (132) to help him through the trauma. The Scriptures he turns to for comfort in this instance are the works of William Shakespeare: 'Who has ever put it better than Bardolph, speaking of the dead Falstaff? "Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!"' Sargeson continues:

I was ... not unaware that Shakespeare had also made the aged Lear say, 'Never, never, never, never, never!' And yes indeed, just that one word, two syllables repeated — to become a blank-verse line of emotional desolation never perhaps anywhere paralleled: and yet so rhythmically satisfying one forecasts its being repeated and echoed through the years and centuries . . .

It is fitting that Sargeson should turn to literature rather than the Bible for several reasons: the fact of the Church's attitude towards homosexuality, although the conflict between the teachings of the Bible and homosexuality is never directly referred to by Sargeson; the fact that Harry, although a Catholic, was not overly religious; and not the least, the appropriateness of Sargeson, who had devoted his life to literature, finding consolation in the words of a writer who stands at the head of the English canon. Sargeson responds to Lear's words not only in terms of content but of form: it is 'rhythmically satisfying'. By replacing the Bible with Shakespeare, or choosing literature over the Scriptures of his upbringing, Sargeson is drawing attention to the relationship between them. Literature is now, for him, able to provide spiritual comfort - it is a religious substitute in a secular age - just as his journey on the way to becoming a writer is a spiritual quest.

In *Once is Enough* Sargeson mentions his adolescent 'secret and no doubt absurd hopes of being a sort of imitation Christ'. It is when these hopes fail that he describes

the birth (or perhaps I should more properly say discovery), of an impulse that was to be closely connected with what I later on conceived to be the aim and purpose of my life ... an infinitely varied and complicated game of trying to discover the facts about the human situation, of trying to illuminate them if I could . . . (66)

In trying to 'imitate Christ' Sargeson is playing a role universal to spiritual autobiography. As de Mijolla comments in *Autobiographical Quests*: 'The Scriptures offer many admirable figures, most in the tradition of *Imitatio Christi*, or Paul, or every sinner come to see, be cleansed, and called to tell. Unified in the scriptural figural tradition, these become sectarian in autobiographical interpretation' (2). This passage also parallels Stephen Dedalus' experiences in *A Portrait*. Stephen rejects the priesthood and decides to become an artist, at the same time placing Art above God and seeing himself as above God in that as an artist he will be able to create things which are superior and immortal. Sargeson is drawing a connection between religion, or spirituality, and literature, that is at once Joycean and modernist.

Direct reference is made to the 'Creation' throughout the autobiography, serving to remind the reader of the Joycean relationship between the artist and God. In *Never Enough*, Sargeson describes his reasons for a pre-dawn walk along the beach one morning:

What I was after was to see the Creation happen all over again. Which I did ... What I remember most keenly from that before-daylight morning on the beach is what I think of as the GAP. On the one hand Creation (which is positive); and on the other hand Rules (which so often and so distressingly turn out to be negations). The region in between has been my life, a region where I have spent much time making my own bridges: there has been reconciliation of a sort, life and livelihood have been tolerable. (68)

In this instance, God's creation (represented by the dawn) is directly likened to what Sargeson does as a writer. 'Creation' is the domain of the imagination, as opposed to puritan society ('Rules') which works as a negative force against the artist. The statement is also important because it implies that Sargeson, following the modernist conception of 'the artist', sees himself as 'special' because he inhabits the liminal space of the 'GAP'; he is outside society, yet unable to transcend it.

There is another reference to creation later in *Never Enough*, and it is again symbolised by the dawn. Sargeson says that when he is staying at his friend M's, he 'can be out of bed before daylight and away up into the bush so that [he] may stand or sit and watch the day break — which is virtually to be present at Creation all over again' (144). Coming as it does in the penultimate paragraph of the autobiography, this statement may seem to affirm Sargeson's religious beliefs, as if in his old age he has reverted to the Christianity that so strongly influenced his adolescence. However, from Sargeson's previous statements the reader is aware that when Sargeson refers to the 'Creation' with a capital 'C' he is not emphasising God's omnipotence, but is rather reiterating the modernist connection between the role of the artist and God, and the magical power of the imagination.

The power of the imagination is foregrounded repeatedly throughout the autobiography.⁷ The final epiphany of *Once is Enough*, which I will discuss below, is the ultimate example of the capacity of the imagination.

⁷ For example: in *Never Enough* Sargeson mentions this in relation to a friend, 'Doc' Smith: 'the environment he saw and experienced was one that had long ago become so subjective that it would not be untrue to say that it was a good deal the work of his own imagination' (45); later in the volume Sargeson says that he himself 'relied so much upon [his] imagination [that he] would never notice surroundings that an impartial camera eye could be relied upon not to miss' (81), and describes a short story of his, 'Boy', as being based on an incident from his uncle's boyhood to which the author applied his 'imagination to give it shape and force' (80). In *More Than Enough* Sargeson emphasises the reader's role in responding to his writing: 'I learned to use my imagination to assist me in becoming explicit on paper, while at the same time leaving a good deal to become intelligible to the reader only upon the condition of a halfway meeting: he must not expect much from me unless he used *his* imagination' (71). In his story 'Conversation With My Uncle' the narrator's uncle 'can't suppose' (10): if 'suppose' is a synonym for 'imagine', then his uncle is damned not only for his puritanism, but his lack of imagination.

III. The physical environment.

There is another facet to the place of spirituality in the autobiography. Sargeson's self-identification with Christian in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is not consistent but complex and environment-dependent. It is only when climbing Te Aroha or journeying through the countryside that such a feeling occurs. For example, when Sargeson visits his uncle on his King Country farm after attending a bible camp, he is fired with the 'desire to propagate [his] Christian faith', and 'priggishly tried to insist on his [uncle] agreeing with what [he] had to say' (45-46). Again, however, it is not so much the events of the camp that provoke this outburst ('singing hymns, and discussing the measures we would take to win the world for Christ in one generation') but the effects of the environment immediately around him, having been picked up by his uncle from the train station at night and crossing a river on horseback after a bridge is washed out. 'After that the journey seemed endless and every moment I expected to encounter some fresh terror' (44-45). Safe in the kitchen at his uncle's he makes this comment:

constantly reminded of my heroic ride by the sound of wind and rain, it was inevitable I suppose that I should become over-excited and begin to imagine myself in my pilgrim's role — and I don't remember it bothered me at all that my uncle's kitchen could hardly be said to resemble either the heaven that Bunyan's hero achieved, or that private heaven I had established for myself on the Te Aroha mountain-top.
(45)

For the young Sargeson, the feeling of being a pilgrim of God, like Christian's Bunyan, only comes when on an actual physical journey, with travel, excitement, and the possibility of danger combining to fire his imagination. This accentuates the relationship between the journey Sargeson is making in the present of the text – his journey to 'find his own New Zealand' thus takes on a spiritual dimension – but it also emphasises the relationship between spirituality and the physical environment.

Later in *Once is Enough* Sargeson states that he sees his uncle's farm as a replacement for Te Aroha in his spiritual geography.

I had transferred to my uncle and the farm all the affection which had previously been fixed on that transcendental heaven I had imagined at the top of Te Aroha mountain ... the farm was at one and the same time a new heaven and a new earth, two separate entities that were inseparably united (69).

He refers back to this in each of the two following volumes: in *More Than Enough* he admits that '[his] most truly spiritual place [was his] uncle's farm' (111), and when he sees Harry for the first time, curry-combing a horse, he says: 'I know it occurred to me to think of Te Aroha mountain besides my uncle and his farm: and here, right under my nose as it were, in my own home town, was the same thing, but now with the scale reduced' (57). In *Never Enough* he speaks of the 'locatings' of two things of value to him, '[his] Waikato uncle's dairy farm a few miles from Hamilton, and ...[his] King Country uncle and his farm', as being 'practical realizations of the deep religious-cum-human feeling which [he] had first become intensely aware of through [his] youthful climbing of the mountain at Te Aroha' (54). The 'deep religious-cum-human feeling' is precipitated by different landscapes, showing that Sargeson's sense of spirituality is closely linked to the environment. And they are specifically *rural* landscapes. In *Once is Enough* Sargeson sets up a dichotomy between rural and city or suburbia, clearly valuing the former above the latter, which is one reason why he values his uncle's farm so highly.⁸

The issue of environment is especially relevant because one of the major themes in *Once is Enough* is Sargeson's growing awareness of himself as a New Zealander and not a colonial away from 'Home', a theme which will be continued in the following two volumes. In *Once is Enough*, when Sargeson relates his spirituality to the land in a European version of *turangawaewae*, he is grounding himself as a New Zealander. In the history of New Zealand literature Sargeson is known for the serious approach he took to his writing.⁹ He was not simply aiming to create any kind of literature, but looking for a

⁸ For example, at the end of the first chapter, Sargeson compares Tauranga unfavourably with Te Aroha: 'The lights of Tauranga could show me only suburban gardens, their plaster rabbits and their plaster fishing gnomes' (15). This pro-country, anti-suburbia theme continues throughout the autobiography.

⁹ For example, H. Winston Rhodes in his introduction to *I Saw In My Dream* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1974): 'No New Zealander has provided more valuable glimpses of the progress of a writer determined to find the mode of expression most suited to his material than Frank Sargeson. None has shown himself so

way to reflect New Zealand in his writing. The (especially) rural landscape plays a large part in his writing, just as (like the puritan social environment of his upbringing) it has an influence on his state of mind as a youth.

Sargeson's ascents of Te Aroha show an aspect of his personality diametrically opposed to the part of him that identified with Bunyan's Christian: at the same time that the Scriptures influenced him so profoundly, he was conscious of a part of himself that rebelled against them. He begins each climb by seeing himself as Christian but further on up the ascent undergoes a radical transformation.

[I]t was as though the devil entered into me ... It was the pure life of the senses that I temporarily lived, a pure and shameless life that was suddenly and miraculously permitted me. But only too soon some word or thought was bound to remind me of my pilgrim's role ... and somewhere at the back of my mind there was always the memory that, after all, it *was* heaven at the top. (15)

Just as the physical act of climbing a mountain reminds the young Sargeson of his 'pilgrim's role', so is the feeling of being possessed by the devil a consequence of his environment: 'that half-lit place of springing trees and wheeling ferns and swinging vines.'

Sargeson's 'life of the senses' is similar to what Northrop Frye calls the primary concerns of the human race (food, sex, property, and freedom of movement). These concerns are in a sense animalistic because they are requirements 'that we share with animals on a physical level'.¹⁰ Secondary concerns, according to Frye, develop after these primary needs are met; these are specific to humans, sophisticated, and intellectual, including 'our political, religious, and other ideological loyalties.' By giving in to his primary concerns, which are those of the body, Sargeson is rejecting his intellectualism, which includes his Christian upbringing. Ray Copland's comment in his *Landfall* review of *Once is Enough* that Sargeson experiences a 'sense of release associated with the steep

conscious of the problems associated with both manner and matter of the developing novelist or has paid more attention to a craft that involves the attempt to understand and reveal the human situation as well as the constant endeavour to discover the appropriate pattern and the fitting but individual style' (ix).

country' (69) emphasises that the roles Sargeson plays are strongly environment-dependent. While certain environments encourage him to identify with Christian, prompting his intellectual side, which is strongly influenced by reading literature like the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*, other environments have the opposite effect on him, encouraging his physical side, or the part which is concerned with the body, the senses, and sex.

Later in *Once is Enough* Sargeson recalls the 'pure shameless life of the senses which [he] was miraculously permitted on the Te Aroha mountain side' (108) to describe how he feels after mutual masturbation with a schoolboy friend ('a few minutes of mutual enjoyment and the relief that followed'). In doing so he is linking his activities with his friend with the 'devilish' aspect of his personality and thus it is shown to be sinful (as puritanism sees bodily pleasure as evil), although by saying that it was undertaken 'shamelessly' Sargeson is distancing himself from this viewpoint.¹¹ Here the text may be read on several levels. Sargeson is depicting the struggle between the puritanism of his social environment and the desires of the body, but he is also introducing the theme of the divided self. This is significant because as Michael King's biography *Frank Sargeson: A Life* (1995) makes clear, Sargeson's life was divided into two selves: before he became Frank Sargeson he was Norris Frank Davey. (This will be discussed in Part VI of this chapter.) The divided self also appears in his fiction: the protagonist of *I Saw in My Dream*, Henry Griffiths, becomes Dave Spencer in Part Two by combining his middle name with his mother's maiden name, as Sargeson did.

However, spiritual autobiography often details adolescent sexual desire as part of the subject's experiences before conversion. Augustine does not seek to elide 'sinful' behaviour on his part; rather, it is emphasised in the text as part of the narrative strategy to induce the reader to identify with the subject; to make the reader aware that

¹⁰ *The Double Vision*, 6. By 'property' Frye means 'the external forms of what is 'proper' to one's life as an individual, starting with clothing and shelter. These also include what may be called territorial space' (7).

¹¹ He continues: 'I don't know how I was able to reconcile such behaviour with my religiosity, but pressure of desire would rise to such a pitch that my submerged *native good sense* asserted itself and recognised its own need: in other words, *the mechanics of natural grace* were set in motion, and instead of the disquiet of guilt and shame I felt the well-being of satisfaction and gratitude' [my emphases]. In spite of his emphasis on its naturalness, however, his sexuality was still a burden to him, and his problems with desire are made explicit. See *Once is Enough* 73-79, 90, 100.

even a committed Christian may have made mistakes in the past, and to reiterate that it is possible to be forgiven by God. In 2:3 of the *Confessions* Augustine says:

I walked the streets of Babylon, and rolled in its mire, as if it was spices and precious ointments. And to make me cling the more tightly to sin's very navel, my unseen foe trampled me down and seduced me, because I was easy to seduce. (44-45)

Comparison may be drawn between the sixteen year old Augustine wandering the streets of 'Babylon' (actually Thagaste) and Stephen Dedalus, at about the same age, wandering around Dublin:

His blood was in revolt. He wandered up and down the dark slimy streets peering into the gloom of lanes and doorways, listening eagerly for any sound.... He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself. Its murmur besieged his ears like the murmur of some multitude in sleep; its subtle streams penetrated his being. His hands clenched convulsively and his teeth set together as he suffered the agony of its penetration. (108)

Both are writing about sexual desire, but the similarities between the two passages (adolescent narrators walking dirty streets, sin or temptation as an external presence pursuing them) suggest that Joyce is referencing Augustine. Sargeson may be seen to be following in this tradition: by aligning his behaviour with that sanctioned by the spiritual autobiography as a rite of passage for young men, he is writing himself into the tradition. As well as this, he is emphasising *Once is Enough's* position as New Zealand's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

IV. The social environment.

The spiritual crisis Sargeson undergoes in the autobiography is related to the dominant social mindset of his generation; puritanism, represented especially for him by his parents and his home town of Hamilton, and particularly threatening because of its work ethic. In order to become a writer Sargeson must overcome this mindset, which he has internalised.

In *Once is Enough* Sargeson writes of his father: 'Boys at school said that my old man was one of the town's worst wowzers in a town that was run by the wowzers' (83). Oakley Sargeson, Sargeson's uncle (who is never named in the text, although 'Third Class Country', the second part of *Once is Enough*, is dedicated 'To remember, O. S.'), is the original model for the laconic, self-contained, hard-working New Zealand male who appears with such frequency in Sargeson's fiction; the man alone, the one who stood for 'New Zealand as it might worthily have been.' Although Oakley Sargeson technically belongs to Sargeson's parents' generation, the puritan generation – as Ray Copland points out, '[n]one of the grandparents displays the puritanism and narrow propriety that his parents imposed upon the author' (70) - he is set apart because of the manner in which he lives his life. He is without strong religious beliefs, lives and works rurally, and, being unmarried, is outside the normal family unit. Sargeson's decision to stay with his uncle for two years and try to become a writer is significant because his uncle is shown to be the least puritanical of his family members.

Puritanism has two dominant characteristics: its repressive attitude towards sexuality, and its emphasis on the work ethic. The former is documented in Sargeson's novella *When The Wind Blows* (1945) later published as the first part of *I Saw In My Dream*. Sargeson's protagonist, Henry Griffiths, whom King's biography shows to be a strongly autobiographical figure, has a breakdown as a result of the guilt he feels over a particular action: locking a girl at his workplace in a vault so she cannot flirt with the men working outside the window; forcibly repressing her sexuality as his parents and his society have repressed his. Puritanism is shown very strongly to be negative, and also hypocritical: near the beginning of *When The Wind Blows* Henry is told by his mother that he 'deserve[s] to be locked up for the rest of [his] life' (16) for looking at

his aunt getting dressed after her bath, while at the end of the novel he sees his father hiding in the garden watching the same aunt get dressed through the window.

Another characteristic of puritanism is the work ethic. This is illustrated in the diatribe Sargeson gives in *Once is Enough* which represents the social sensibility he offends as a writer of fiction, many of the questions being directed towards his choice of vocation:

Why don't I look on my writing as just a hobby? ... Why don't I get myself a job? Why don't I realise I must earn a proper living the same as other people? ... Why don't I accept my responsibilities? ... Why don't I grow up? Why don't I wake up and stop dreaming? ... Why don't I realise I am a disgrace? ... Why aren't I ashamed of my wasted life? (30-31)

To give up his 'good' office job to become a writer (as it is implied that Sargeson does in *Once is Enough*) is a renunciation of the work ethic because even if he does take on a menial job to support himself, he is failing the puritan value on two counts: he is not doing the best job that he is able to do (and wasting his training as a solicitor), and is not working for the sake of working, but working for the sake of writing. At this time in New Zealand, by no stretch of the imagination was writing creatively full-time seen as working: to be a fiction writer was not an eligible vocation. In 'dropping out', Sargeson is directly rebelling against the values taught to him by society: in a sense, he is replacing puritanism with literature. However, the extent of his puritan hangover is shown both by the frequency with which he treats the theme in his writing and by his initial resistance to the vocation of writer. When a friend suggests he get a menial job in order to save his intellectual energies for writing he is reluctant to act on the suggestion, and senses his friend's perception 'that [Sargeson] could not rid [himself] of the timid, snobbish belief that there was some virtue in [his] being a white collar worker'.¹² This statement may illustrate a degree of class snobbery, but it also shows

¹² p.127. King emphasises that while Sargeson found the puritan environment in which he grew up restrictive, later characterising it as negative in his fiction, he still retained some of its values in the seriousness with which he practiced his craft as a writer. On the back cover of the biography Sargeson is introduced as 'a man of contradictions. While rejecting the puritanism of his youth, he was puritan in his total commitment to his calling as a writer.' King describes the final performance of Sargeson's play *A*

the depth of the puritan work ethic which has been instilled by his parents and New Zealand society in general.

Ultimately, his imagination enables him to 'drop out'. In approaching the Bible subjectively, or by using his imagination, Sargeson is able to see 'one of the dead-ends of puritanism'. It is his imagination which has allowed him to see the weaknesses of and eventually reject the puritanical values and beliefs which are instilled by his parents and reinforced by society, just as his imagination takes him out of the domain of 'Rules' and into a liminal space (the 'GAP') between society and creation. The culminating epiphany of *Once is Enough* is a similar triumph of the imagination over puritanism, in that a scene which showcases the power of the imagination is shown to be responsible for Sargeson's symbolic rejection of puritanism in his decision to become a writer.

V. Spiritual climax: the epiphany in the orchard.

The three stages in the narrative of classic literary epiphany that I have outlined in the introduction, based on the conversion experience of the original spiritual autobiography, are: crisis, manifestation, and revelation resulting from the manifestation. I am not using this definition in order to take a reductive approach to the concept. Rather, it acts like a litmus test for spiritual autobiography – for if an autobiography contains an epiphany which has the structural features of the Joycean epiphany, it shows that the author is appropriating the narrative of spiritual autobiography, deliberately drawing on a wider literary tradition. In Lawrence Jones' article "'New Zealand As It Might Worthily Have Been": Frank Sargeson and the "Pilgrim Dream"', he describes three moments in *Once is*

Time For Sowing: 'The calls ... for 'Author! Author!' were heartfelt in their tribute; and Frank, while expecting his due, found that his customary puritanism made it difficult for him to believe in their sincerity and take any pleasure from them' (354). King quotes Dan Davin as saying that Sargeson 'had that puritan weakness of thinking that social and other tribute should be paid to him in his capacity as artist but being unable to take any real pleasure in the tribute itself' (296), and also that he was 'obsessive' about puritanism: 'He considered himself a puritan, almost necessarily since as a truthful writer he was bound to reflect a society that was itself puritan' (298). In this Sargeson may be compared to Joyce: although he did not become a Catholic priest, his life and his writing were still heavily influenced by his Irish Catholic upbringing.

Enough as epiphanies. I believe that only one - the final epiphany of the volume - is a true literary epiphany, and that the others prefigure this significant moment.

The first, according to Jones, occurs when Sargeson discovers that there is a New Zealand honeysuckle, 'a great tree that grew along the ridges of [his] own country' (47). When Sargeson sees the tree, he is in a state of crisis based on his surroundings: he is staying unwillingly on his uncle's farm, because he is yet to become attached to the place; added to this, his uncle, who is 'unbelieving', has just informed him that 'we're all of us maimed in some way' (46). The 'discovery' of the honeysuckle tree 'somehow mysteriously reveal[s] to [him] something of the true nature of the pilgrimage that [he] had so persistently imagined' (47): that is, Sargeson's pilgrimage to make a spiritual connection; not with God, but with his own country. Jones describes it as 'a vision that became an epiphany for him' (88), but although the crisis and the revelation of mysterious origin are epiphanic, there is no unusual manifestation like Stephen seeing a girl whom he first describes as a bird and then as an angel, or Linda Burnell in Mansfield's story 'Prelude' seeing a ship for an aloe tree. There is nothing magical or special about the appearance of the honeysuckle: it is simply there, on the hillside of his uncle's farm.

The 'second epiphany' (89), according to Jones, occurs in a scene played out in Sargeson's uncle's orchard where Sargeson and his uncle are scything the grass. Again Sargeson is in a state of crisis, his uncle's refusal to believe in God compounded by his serenity, which his nephew, still experiencing problems with sexual desire, finds infuriating. The conversation turns to Sargeson's age on passing his solicitor's examinations in two years' time and his uncle tells him that 'the time would be gone in no time at all. And in no time after that if that was what [he] wanted [he] could be a married man' (78). The notion shocks Sargeson.

I passionately wanted to deny my uncle's last words. Apart from passing my examinations I truly did not know what end I wanted to aim at and achieve — except for some notion, remote and tenuous yet at the same time powerful, that it must be something you could see and handle, something that was in some way related to the fruit that was hanging on the trees all around me, and as surely

connected with myself as the fruit was connected with the trees and the trees with my uncle. When I could speak my voice sounded strange. But I don't want to be married, I said — and I stammered it out: *I want to be just the same as you* . . . And my words had an effect far beyond anything I had ever dreamed of. My uncle dropped the scythe and stumbled off to the house without a syllable: but my astonished eyes had seen his face change into the face of a stranger ... somebody who was tired and worn out with suffering some pain that was never complained of, and nobody had ever guessed . . . (78-79)

Until now Sargeson's homosexuality has not figured in the autobiography, although later he admits an attraction to a man in his bible class. Even here, although the scene strongly suggests to the reader that his uncle is homosexual, the Sargeson who witnessed his uncle's reaction is still ignorant, although aware of its importance: 'I never forgot the details and frequently told myself there was a strange mystery hidden in it somewhere which I would eventually solve'.¹³

The scene contains a crisis (Sargeson's problems with sexual desire, coupled with his aim to ruin his uncle's agnostic contentment) and a revelation (*'I want to be just the same as you'*), but again it is an epiphany without a magical kind of manifestation. Both these scenes prefigure the epiphany which occurs at the end of the first volume, which Jones describes as the third epiphany in the autobiography, 'the second epiphany in the orchard' (89), and which I believe is the only complete or 'real' literary epiphany in that it involves a manifestation of unexplained origin. The final epiphany is also the thematic and structural climax of the narrative.

First, there is another potential epiphany prior to this, in the scene where the young Sargeson is tempted into shooting pigeons with his uncle's neighbour's son, Miles. It is recalled when the author describes a time when he was staying with his uncle and they went to see 'what bushmen called a drive' (57). Miles is there, whom Sargeson dislikes for reasons other than that he reminds him uncomfortably of himself.¹⁴ Seeing

¹³ p.79. In *Frank Sargeson* King points out that some commentators interpreted this passage 'at the very least, as evidence of Norris Davey's *belief* in his uncle's homosexuality' (48), rather than being evidence of Oakley Sargeson's homosexuality.

¹⁴ The similarities between them - both are 'aggressive and argumentative' (61) - position Miles as a *doppelgänger* or double of the young Sargeson, representing his potential 'evil' nature or the side of him which is prone to temptation.

Miles also reminds him of a guilty secret he has on his conscience, from a time narrated in flashback when he accompanied Miles and his brother on a bird-shooting expedition. Sargeson is disgusted when Miles kills a morepork. Soon, however, he becomes caught up in the excitement, and joins in with gusto. Sargeson's actions lie heavily on his conscience; not for Miles' reprimand, but because he enjoyed the shooting so much. '[I]t was a deeper and more complicated fear that was worrying me, a fear not so much of Miles as of myself and my own nature' (65).

This scene is crucial because it engenders in Sargeson a 'despairing sense of personal imperfection [which] seemed to enclose [him] in a perfect hell of misery and doubt', and it is this moment that he sees in retrospect as the first time in which a vocation other than being an 'imitation Christ' occurs to him.

[T]he occasion seemed to mark the birth (or perhaps I should more properly say discovery), of an impulse that was to be closely connected with what I later on conceived to be the aim and purpose of my life ... *my mind made one of those sudden little jumps, seldom to be accounted for, that one becomes accustomed to in a lifetime* ... I had deceived myself about my own nature, so what could I possibly know about other people? ... I seemed to forget my miseries in the discovery of a new and fascinating game.

I did not then know it was a game I would be impelled to go on playing all my life, an infinitely varied and complicated game of trying to discover the facts about the human situation, of trying to illuminate them if I could . . . [66; my emphasis].

This revelation is another minor epiphany. It has a similar narrative structure, beginning with a crisis (the worry that Miles might mention the episode in front of his uncle, who does not know about the pigeons, and told Sargeson 'that nobody except a bastard would ever shoot them unless hard-up for a belly-ful of tucker' [64], and the fear of evil in himself that the episode induced). The crisis results in a manifestation (the pigeon-shooting in flashback), and subsequent revelation ('my mind made one of those sudden little jumps, seldom to be accounted for') induced by but not directly connected to the manifestation. However, as with the above epiphanies, there is nothing extraordinary or magical about the manifestation, unlike the one that occurs at the end of the volume.

Like the others, it occurs on a visit to his uncle's farm. Approaching the farm, Sargeson is so pleased to be back that he is 'quite silly with excitement — stimulated to such a degree it was as though all [his] glands were drooling their juices — as though anticipating the climax of an emotional spasm' (128). His uncle is not at home, and Sargeson walks through the orchard, his surroundings leading him to recall the day where he had told his uncle 'I want to be just the same as you', which he says that he had forgotten about, despite his insistence at the time on committing it to memory in order to solve the puzzle later.

Sargeson, in the present of the text, is in crisis: a crisis of vocation and identity, with the added memory of having 'so devastatingly affected [his] uncle' on that occasion in the orchard in the past. It is in this state that the epiphany occurs.

[I]t was suddenly as though memory began to function again with such an intensity that it supplied me with images visible to the wide-open physical eye: the immediate scene was dissolved as the previous one reimposed itself: my uncle was there with his scythe, the fruit was hanging on the trees, and I was listening as I had listened previously for those sounds which might reveal to me the secrets of all creation . . .

Sargeson is witnessing a manifestation of the scene from the past which at the time he could not understand or could not deal with because of the issue of homosexuality. He is aware of the unreality of what he is seeing: 'I have no explanation of this apparently sensory perception of a scene which did not at the moment exist'. On this, Sargeson diverts and assures the reader that 'I have never experienced anything of the kind previously, nor have I ever since',¹⁵ in an effort to banish incredulity and reinforce the

¹⁵ He gives one exception, which he describes as a 'sort of text-book instance of hallucinated vision'. The vision is included in parentheses on pp.131-32: '(I was returning after a day's gardening job, feeling more than usually tired owing to tuberculosis which had not as yet been diagnosed: and as the tram passed Mt Hobson reserve in Auckland, it surprised me to see a group of ten, twenty, perhaps thirty animals which I could not identify appear from behind some trees: black, and somewhat larger than goats, but shaped more like pigs except for their long legs, they galloped across open ground before disappearing over a curve of the hill: immediately they were out of sight I looked expectantly about the tram, wanting to ask somebody to tell me what the animals were — and it presently upset me very much to infer from my neighbours' indifferent expressions that nobody had seen anything unusual except myself.)' King connects the hallucination with Sargeson's TB: 'Soon after this hallucination he discovered a sore swelling in his groin, at which point he was consigned by his doctor to bed. Only

authenticity of what he is relating. He even suggests a reason for it occurring: 'Perhaps it was some trick of the mind which had been stimulated by memory and emotion to a unique exaggeration of its image-making capacity' (132).

The scene is typical of epiphany in that it seems to occur outside actual time and space – indeed, to contradict actual time and space. '[F]or the duration of the experience I had no sensation of chill when the early spring sunlight was obscured by an abundant display of foliage completely out of season. Joshua's miracle was perhaps not so remarkable: for him the sun had lengthened out the day, but for me it had altered the seasons.' The direct biblical reference again strengthens the connection between Sargeson's discovery of himself as a writer and the religious epiphany (as does the fact that it occurs in an orchard: Augustine's was in a garden). He remains in such a state until his uncle arrives home after sunset, when the fact that he was totally unconscious of the falling temperature is reiterated:

I remember I was astonished by the clouds of misty breath that he and the two dogs breathed: I hadn't felt the icy chill that fell from the vast, empty sky and seemed to freeze the grass almost as it settled: I hadn't noticed that the telephone wire had begun its shrill warning that unless the sky filled with clouds there would be a night of many degrees of frost ... (132)

There is no direct revelation after the manifestation occurs. There is a paragraph break in the text, and then the next paragraph, the last of the book, begins abruptly: 'Within a few weeks I had made my arrangements ... and settled with my uncle while I tried strenuously for nearly two years to discover myself as a writer'. The decision to write full-time is the result of the revelation brought about by the manifestation, although not related directly. It is left to the reader (the reader's *imagination*) to connect the decision to become a full-time writer with the afternoon in the orchard spent in the afternoon of the past. The revelation is not described in such dramatic terms as Stephen Dedalus' in *A Portrait*, but the outcome is the same.

when a second swelling appeared on his chest almost a year later was the problem diagnosed: surgical tuberculosis' (*Frank Sargeson*, 186).

Crisis, unusual manifestation from everyday surroundings, indirect revelation: the scene exhibits the three narrative stages of modernist epiphany. Before in *Once is Enough* Sargeson has mentioned his goal of becoming a writer but has been unable to make the break from the puritan work ethic that this would entail: it is only after the manifestation in the orchard that he is finally able to set about this. In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors*, Jones describes it as 'confirm[ing] his vocation as a writer rising above the constricting effect of environment'.¹⁶ The epiphany is the ultimate example of the capacity of the imagination in that it displaces the effect of puritanism that caused Sargeson to defer committing himself to writing for so long. Thus, it is the climax of a recurring theme throughout the book.

Sargeson's narrative is that of one who must overcome obstacles in order to become an artist - not the twin obstacles of poverty and ill-health, which traditionally befall the artist (in fact these will be the major hurdles that Sargeson faces in the next two episodes of autobiography) - but the legacy of puritanism inherited from his parents and society, especially its emphasis on the work ethic. His imagination is the key to overcoming a particularly influential state of mind, as acceptance of God, in the traditional spiritual autobiography, is the catalyst for overcoming another state of mind, that of religious non-belief or uncertainty.

The epiphany also has an important structural function. It gives a dramatic conclusion to the narrative and ties all the threads of the volume neatly together, like Sargeson at the end of *Never Enough* recognising his friend M's farm from a trip he had taken years before with a friend, and which is described at the start of that volume. The epiphany, like the coincidence found in life and accentuated in fiction, is a structural device that gives Sargeson's life shape, purpose, and meaning. One of the universal motives for writing autobiography is the desire to make meaning of one's life. In the traditional spiritual autobiography the ultimate meaning, or defining, self-

¹⁶ p.325. Jones goes on to assert that there is another, more significant climax in Sargeson's autobiography: 'the real climax is his rediscovery of his vocation in his 'second career' as a writer, the 'post-Sargeson' Sargeson who straightened up out of the assumed 'stoop' of his early first-person proletarian fiction and put into free play the full range of his verbal inventiveness ...[etc]'. Thus, Jones believes the overall narrative is 'a story of discovery, loss, and recovery'. Structurally, this certainly unifies the three books of the autobiography. However, I believe this first climax is more significant in terms of how the autobiography is a spiritual autobiography, because it is so deliberately literary, and the relationship to Joyce's *Portrait* so clear.

validating Other of the subject's life is God. Augustine seeks to know God through himself, and to know himself through God. He is confessing to God: it is God who conditions his self-construction in the text. In the secular autobiography where there is no recourse to God, the meaning of one's life, which defines one's identity, needs to be found elsewhere, and for Sargeson this is found in his vocation; the journey towards which then becomes the framework of the autobiography.

Thus the scene in the orchard creates a satisfying ending to the first volume of the autobiography, giving Sargeson's life as a writer a sense of purpose and inevitability. Also, the epiphany marks Sargeson as somehow special, as if he was 'destined' to be an artist by the special power of his imagination which would afterwards be his primary tool in the creation of his art, just as he would be seen as somehow special, set apart, if he had claimed to have seen a vision not of a previous afternoon but of God. In the first volume of the autobiography it is made clear throughout that he always intended to become a writer, but the epiphany stamps his decision with the mark of *destiny*. Sargeson's writing of himself as one who experiences something unusual, or special, fits with the modernist or romantic idea of the artist as one who is gifted, yet somehow alienated or isolated from the rest of society; a prophet-figure who speaks for society, like Daphne Withers in Janet Frame's *Owls Do Cry* (1957). By describing his experience of the epiphany, which marks him as somehow special, he is validating his decision to become an artist.

This is especially significant considering the pressures working against becoming an artist at this period in New Zealand history, the Provincial era in New Zealand literature. In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors*, Lawrence Jones shows Janet Frame's first story of the bird, the hawk, and the bogie ('Once upon a time there was a bird. One day a hawk came out of the sky and ate up the bird. The next day a big bogie came up from behind the hill and ate up the hawk for eating up the bird') to be symbolic of the 'one story' told by all New Zealand literary autobiographers, quoting R. T. Robertson's interpretation:

In a provincial society, the hawk is both the society and untamed nature; and the bogie is the art which eats up both

for eating up the bird of inspiration or imagination in an unimaginative society.¹⁷

Thus the 'one story' is that of the writer's (the bird in Frame's story) struggle against the society which seeks to destroy it (the hawk). It is a bleak outlook: although the writer has a larger protector, Art (the bogie), which ultimately redeems the writer's struggle, he or she faces destruction in the process; being symbolically 'eaten' by society.

This story also describes one of the basic underlying principles of literary modernism: the belief in Art as a redeeming force. In Mansfield's stories, it is Art that transforms the quotidian into something better, more beautiful, more truthful: the role of the artist is highly valued. For Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, artistic creation is superior even to divine creation. Art has ordering powers, of which the epiphany is the supreme example.

Frame's story, or Jones's 'one story', is reflected in Sargeson's autobiography, which Jones states in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* 'may very well prove to be the definitive New Zealand account of the making of the provincial artist' (324). The major struggle Sargeson faces from provincial society (the hawk) is against its puritan values, which he has internalised: specifically, its firm work-ethic and emphasis on conformity. These values aim to destroy (or 'swallow up') individuality, imagination, the creative instinct. In order to become a writer Sargeson must resist this by quitting his job and 'dropping out' of society. By using the device of the epiphany, Sargeson is using Art, with its ultimate powers of redemption, to sanction his decision.

To sum up, it can be seen that *Once is Enough* draws closely on the conventions of spiritual autobiography. Direct reference is made to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the final epiphany, prefigured or hinted at on at least four other occasions in the text, has strong structural and thematic similarities to the epiphany which Stephen Dedalus experiences. Like Stephen's epiphany, it is the moment when Sargeson's decision to become an artist becomes obvious and final. Also, in spite of

¹⁷ p.313. The original Robertson article, 'Bird, Hawk, Bogie: Janet Frame, 1952-62,' may be found in *Studies in the Novel*, 4 (1972).

the intensely spiritual effect created by Joyce's use of language, the source of Stephen's epiphany is not God, and neither is Sargeson's: rather, the origins of both are situated in the artistic imagination.

By acknowledging his influence to Joyce, Sargeson is self-consciously placing himself in the tradition of literary autobiography that takes its form from spiritual autobiography. Also self-conscious is his continued identification of his younger-self protagonist with Christian of Bunyan's spiritual allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*. In aligning the progression of the narrative to the progression of Christian's journey, Sargeson is deliberately giving his narrative a spiritual dimension.

Another way he does this is by making a connection between literature and religion, using the medium of the imagination to engage with both: both, Sargeson shows, are strongly subjective processes. This is a re-visiting of the modernist concept of the artist illustrated in Stephen's epiphany. The artist takes the place of God, creating works which are superior because they are 'imperishable'. Throughout his autobiography, Sargeson returns to this theme, linking his role as a writer to the Creation of God.

Finally, the physical environment is also shown to have a spiritual significance for Sargeson. His sense of identification with Bunyan's pilgrim Christian is environment-dependent. Some places have the opposite effect on him, being linked to the pleasures of the body, against which Sargeson struggles, and which, like Augustine and Joyce, hinder his progress towards virtue. However, in detailing his struggle with adolescent sexual desire, and the problem of reconciling this with his religiosity and the strongly repressive attitude to sex found in the puritan society around him, Sargeson has a strong literary tradition behind him.

Michael King's biography of Sargeson, *Frank Sargeson: A Life* (1995) shows there to be another aspect to Sargeson's use of the spiritual autobiographical narrative. As he used the redeeming power of Art to sanction his decision to become a writer, so does Sargeson use Art in another way to elide an event which his biographer describes

as the determining crisis of his life, but which Sargeson never so much as mentions in his autobiography.¹⁸

VI. Michael King, Norris Davey, and the 'real' determining crisis of Sargeson's life.

In the Author's Note to his biography of Sargeson, King says that passages in the memoirs 'often revealed additional significance when they were united thematically or chronologically' (424). One of these occasions occurs at the end of *Once is Enough*. At the time Sargeson experiences the epiphany in his uncle's orchard, he is working as a civil servant in Wellington, after leaving home and travelling overseas. One of the reasons given for leaving home is the 'determining crisis of [his] life' (106), which he claims was his mother's discovery of a letter sent to him by a friend. In the letter, his friend 'rebuked [Sargeson] for writing indecencies', and asked him to 'please spare him in future letters' (104-05). Sargeson's mother is upset by the fact that it is his friend, and not Sargeson, who 'had grown up *clean*' (104), which immediately marks Sargeson as *dirty*. However, he turns the shame, or blame of the situation around. He is not shamed by the discovery so much as shocked at his mother's reading his letter, which he repeatedly emphasises is 'wicked':

To read another person's letter! It was a wicked thing to do, the sort of thing *I* might have done perhaps, but my mother — never! (105)

[I]t was my mother's having committed a wickedness to catch me out in one that disturbed me most of all (107).

¹⁸ King mentions other discrepancies between Sargeson's autobiography and his biography, especially in regard to dates or sequences of events. He describes Sargeson's autobiographies as essentially 'real' or 'true' but crafted to suit Sargeson's purposes. King sees 'Up onto the Roof and Down Again' as 'an imaginative construction based on real people and real events' (309), and says of the autobiographies: 'They were not, like conventional memoirs, written chronologically ... Nor was everything in them 'true' in the sense of a documentary depiction of events. The account of the journey to Mount Maunganui to stay with E.P. Dawson ('K') which opens *Once is Enough*, for example, is an imaginative recreation of three such visits; and his two trips to Invercargill are fused into one ... There is little in the memoirs that is strictly untrue; they simply reconstruct decisions and events to give shape and meaning to the course his life had taken' (398). To prove his point, he quotes Sargeson saying of 'Up Onto the Roof': 'At this distance I would hate to be asked to cross my heart & say yes, this or that really was a "happening"' (309).

Thus the determining crisis of his life, according to Sargeson, was his mother's hypocritical actions in reading his letter. Details relating to the incident appear at least twice in his fiction. Earlier, I referred to the central theme of puritan hypocrisy in *When the Wind Blows*, the first part of *I Saw in My Dream*. Sargeson's mother's insinuation that her son has not grown up 'clean' is directly repeated when Henry Griffiths's mother rebukes him for watching his aunt get dressed through the bathroom window: 'After all the years I've tried to do my best for you, she said, to think I couldn't bring you up *clean*' (15-16). Yet the novella ends with Henry seeing his father watching the same aunt get dressed through the window. The incident of a parent reading their child's letters appears in *I For One...* (1954) when the narrator, Katherine Sheppard, asks: 'The question is, Would mother look into my private papers? That I am capable of supposing for a single moment that she might fill me with shame, yet for all that I don't know' (13-14). For Sargeson to keep returning to the incident of the letter in his fiction shows the effect the episode obviously had on him.

In *Once is Enough*, it results in a soul-searching afternoon, spent out of doors, away from the restricting environment of immediate society. The epiphany in the orchard takes place over five years later – when Sargeson has returned from overseas – but is described only about 20 pages later in the text, which seems to invite the reader to unite these crucial passages, as King suggests can be done 'to [reveal] additional significance'. Thus, what Sargeson describes as 'the determining crisis of [his] life' may be factored in to his state of mind on entering the orchard that afternoon. In other words, the crisis is not just one of identity and vocation, but also has to do with a transgression of sexual puritan values by Sargeson. For sexuality is the real issue of his 'determining crisis', in spite of Sargeson turning the episode of the letter around to condemn his mother's behaviour.

Sargeson's autobiography totally excludes an event which King sees as a pivotal moment in his life and uses as a structural feature in the biography to divide his book into before and after (literally Part One and Part Two), as he believes it divided his subject's life. He says in the prologue: 'This book is about both men and both lives, which were also one life' (11). The event that King believes had such a life-altering

effect on Sargeson is described in Chapter 6 of the biography, 'The Long Shadow'. This was the first time details of the event had been published, after being elided by Dennis McEldowney in *Frank Sargeson In His Time* (1976).¹⁹

King tells us that when Sargeson was working in Wellington in 1929, he met a man named Leonard Hollobin and accompanied him to his boarding-house. Unbeknown to either, Hollobin, 'known to the police as a 'corruptor of youth'' (93), was being followed by detectives, and while the pair were engaged in mutual masturbation, the detectives burst into the room and arrested both for indecent assault. 'The charge, laid under section 153 of the Crimes Act 1908, carried a maximum sentence of 'ten years imprisonment with hard labour', with the option of being 'flogged or whipped once, twice, or thrice''. Sargeson was tried in a much-publicised courtcase, but for agreeing to testify against Hollobin and pose as the victim was not sentenced to prison, although found guilty 'on one charge of indecent assault on a male' (94).

His suspended sentence meant that if Norris [Sargeson] was caught offending again within two years he would be recalled by the court to serve a prison sentence. This was a risk that Edwin and Rachel Davey [his parents] wanted to reduce. Norris himself would have had no appetite for remaining in circulation where he was likely to encounter people who knew Consequently it was a matter of general relief when Oakley Sargeson restated his willingness to have his nephew stay with him on the farm in the King Country. (95-96)

King's biography shows that what Sargeson describes in his autobiography as the determining crisis of his life - his mother's discovery and reading of his friend's letter -

¹⁹ McEldowney's biography was, however, the first place that Sargeson's birth name was revealed in print. Keith Sinclair comments on reviewing it in 1978: 'McEldowney reveals that Sargeson changed his name — but does not tell us why' ('New Zealand Literary History', 74). Chapter 1 of the biography, 'Norris into Frank', begins: 'Norris Frank Davey was born in Hamilton, New Zealand, on 23 March 1903. Which is to say that Frank Sargeson was born in Hamilton on 23 March 1903; Sargeson being the name he later adopted' (7). The reason for going to live on his uncle's farm is given by McEldowney as follows: 'After trying, with depressing results, to combine writing with his work in Wellington, he resigned, went to live with his uncle near Taumarunui, and spent two years helping with the farm and struggling to write a novel' (17). McEldowney is also reticent on the subject of Sargeson's homosexuality. He describes Harry Doyle

was not the 'real' determining crisis. Rather, it was the arrest in Wellington and subsequent courtcase that was deeply traumatic for him: so traumatic he spent almost two years in the country and he changed his name on re-entering society. 'Norris Davey found his way to Okahukura at the end of October 1929, from whence he was to emerge nearly two years later as Frank Sargeson' (96).

In Part One of King's book he calls his subject by his real name – Norris Frank Davey – while in Part Two he refers to him by the name he later adopted, Frank Sargeson.²⁰ Details of Sargeson's life that he elides in his autobiography, such as his real name, and his reason for changing his name, often occur in his fiction. For example, Henry Griffiths has a breakdown after he locks a girl at his workplace in a vault so she cannot flirt with the men working outside the window; forcibly repressing her sexuality as his parents and his society have repressed his. The threat of jail is always in the background, reinforcing society's sexual laws: when Henry's mother tells him off for watching his aunt get dressed, he is told that he 'deserve[s] to be locked up for the rest of [his] life'.²¹ When Sargeson extended the original novella, Henry becomes Dave just as Norris became Frank. There are further similarities: Henry's life ends, in *When the Wind Blows* (or Part One of *I Saw in My Dream*) on the arrival of detectives (as Sargeson's as 'Norris' did, in Part One of King's biography), and his new

as 'the Irish –New Zealand former jockey who shared Sargeson's house intermittently for more than forty years' (28), leaving it up to the reader to draw their own conclusions.

²⁰ Sargeson's desire to alter his name actually began earlier than the Wellington episode. King says that when he went to Auckland after first leaving home Sargeson 'discarded the name Norris and asked new friends in Auckland to call him "Davey"' (57). When overseas he adopted the Christian name 'Frank', although he was still Norris on his letters home (68). Once he returned to New Zealand, however, he insisted on being called 'Frank', although this soon failed when people did not take him seriously: 'And so, in his home town at least, he abandoned this modest attempt to forge a new identity' (81). This small-town attitude is captured in Mrs Daley in *I Saw in My Dream*, who reveals Dave's previous identity and tells him: 'You're Henry Griffiths ... so don't tell us any such nonsense. I knew you when you were just so big. You can't tell me you've ever been anybody else except Henry Griffiths. No, and you never will be' (179). King calls him 'Norris' in Part One of the biography and 'Frank' in Part Two, after he leaves his uncle's farm 'to begin life as a new person: Frank Sargeson, writer' (112). 'Apart from periodic recourse to a *nom de plume* in his journalism and occasional pieces, everything considered that Frank wrote for publication from 1931 was submitted to book publishers, newspapers and journals in the name of Frank Sargeson. Norris Davey was interred and, he hoped, forgotten. He introduced himself to new friends and acquaintances by his new name, and he managed to register for unemployment relief as Frank Sargeson' (142). In 1946 he formally changed his name by deed-poll (275). Most of his family continued to call him Norris however, '[t]o his intense annoyance' (143), and his mother's obituary identified him as 'Mr N.F. Davey of Takapuna' (348).

life as Dave begins with the help of a friend's uncle, as Sargeson's new life was aided by his uncle.

Sargeson was obviously willing and able to write autobiographical fiction in which traumatic events in his own life appear through the transformation of Art, but he was not willing to write autobiography in which he set out factually or even hinted at these same events. He parallels the circumstances surrounding the court case in *I Saw in My Dream*, but he was not able to mention those circumstances in his autobiography. King's version of events — that it was the trial and resulting conviction for indecent assault which led him to seek refuge with his uncle on his farm — is very different to Sargeson's. In the autobiography, we are given to believe that Sargeson experiences an epiphany one afternoon in his uncle's orchard which led him to decide to devote his life to writing and give up his white-collar job in the city. This is not, however, how events panned out in real life, where Sargeson left home, worked in Auckland, went overseas, returned to work at the Public Trust Office in Wellington, and retired to the sanctuary of his uncle's farm after the court case.

King's definition of the determining crisis of Sargeson's life is also different to his subject's. King makes it clear that the court case was the determining crisis: Sargeson accords his mother reading the letter this place in his life. Aside from not wanting his life as Norris Davey or the court case to be associated with his life as Frank Sargeson the writer, why does Sargeson choose the episode of the letter?

The events are not essentially unrelated. They both involve a transgression of puritan sexual values (Sargeson writing 'indeencies', Sargeson being convicted of 'indecent' assault), and the human value of privacy by other parties. In his autobiography, as already mentioned, Sargeson never directly refers to the court case, but in the first chapter of *Never Enough* he describes teasing his grandmother's dog by moving his plate of food, and being savaged for his actions. Sargeson counts this as an important life-lesson.

²¹ *I Saw in My Dream*, 16. In 'That Summer', the narrator Bill is jailed for supposed violence against the transvestite 'Maggie', who was in fact been beaten by 'her' sailor boyfriend, who caught Bill in Maggie's room: this time the link between prison and sexuality has particularly homosexual overtones.

I never afterwards required to be told that there is nothing in life more immediately perilous than interference when any creature is engaged upon the exercise of appetite. But it has taken me a lifetime to formulate a human corollary, namely, that the emotional magic which attends this exercise works only for those taking part: no lovers in all human history have ever thought of themselves as engaged in something obscene. Obscenity is to be found in the eye of the beholder — and the more especially when he is prompted to behave as I did, that is to say, interfere. (15)

Without knowledge of the trial, Sargeson's words seem to be an attack on the puritanical values which he must reject in *Once is Enough* in order to become an artist, just as Stephen in *A Portrait* must reject the Catholicism of his upbringing, represented by the vocation of priest. But knowing that Sargeson was judged by a jury to be obscene ('indecent'), makes the passage read as a direct reference to this event.

Autobiography allows Sargeson to put on public record a *different* determining crisis. He takes advantage of the autobiographical form to alter the particulars, and he does this by drawing on a common literary motif, the letter, to replace the conviction for indecent assault, literally using language – or letters – to cover up his life. By using 'letters' to elide the court case, Sargeson is drawing on the redemptive power of Art, as he does by using the modernist device of the epiphany: he is using his powers as a novelist to transform the facts of his life into something more desirable for public consumption.

By writing a portrait of the artist as a young man (paralleling the journey undertaken and resolution achieved in traditional spiritual autobiography) Sargeson is using a pre-sanctioned narrative. In replacing his enforced exile from society with the dramatic final epiphany of *Once is Enough*, Sargeson uses the narrative model of the spiritual autobiography to elide the real reason for his lengthy stay on his uncle's farm. One of the major themes of the volume is the discrepancy Sargeson sees between 'New Zealand as it is, [and] New Zealand as it might worthily have been' (48). In his autobiography we do not get Sargeson as he was, but Sargeson as he might worthily have been, with the particulars of his life altered for the better by the power of Art.

CHAPTER 2:
Lauris Edmond and Sylvia Ashton-Warner:
Gender and ‘The Artist’.

I. Introduction.

There are several outward biographical similarities between the poet Lauris Edmond (1924-2000) and the writer Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1908-1984). Both women were born and raised in the North Island, trained as teachers after high school, and married a teacher. They both had children; Edmond six, and Ashton-Warner three. Marriage and motherhood meant an end to their teaching careers (Edmond’s permanently, Ashton-Warner’s for about five years), as, according to the social ideology of the time, married women did not work. Their artistic drives were similarly affected by the time-consuming nature of being a wife and mother. Both, however, resumed their artistic pursuits later in life, travelled overseas, and achieved renown after their marriages ended; Edmond’s on her separation from her husband Trevor, and Ashton-Warner after the death of her husband Keith Henderson.

An Autobiography (1994) by Edmond and *I Passed This Way* (1979) by Ashton-Warner are both spiritual autobiographies which trace the obstacles and crises which face the female artist in New Zealand.¹ Both write a portrait of the artist as a young woman who has internalised the social expectations of the time (as Sargeson internalised the puritan mindset) in regard to her gender and gets married in her early twenties, stifling

¹ *An Autobiography* is comprised of three earlier volumes: *Hot October: An Autobiographical Story* (1989), *Bonfires in the Rain* (1991), and *The Quick World* (1992). In Chapter 1, I referred to Sargeson’s three memoirs separately rather than looking at *Sargeson* as a whole, primarily because *Once is Enough* stands alone as spiritual autobiography. Edmond’s autobiography I will discuss as a whole because the trilogy has been re-edited for collective publication by Edmond herself (with the help of Anna Rogers). In the Author’s Note she emphasises that although ‘[i]t is ... somewhat reduced in length The changes are in detail, not in events or themes. Indeed I selected for reduction only those passages where I could simplify the outline without altering the substance, or the flavour, of the existing narrative.’ Frame too published three volumes of autobiography: Ashton-Warner’s *I Passed This Way* is the only one under discussion here to have originally appeared as a single, lengthy volume (the 1980 Reed edition is 499 pages).

(for the time being at least) her artistic ambitions. But Art cannot be checked, and the artist eventually resurfaces out of the mists of marriage and motherhood to resume her true nature and achieve fame: at the end of the narrative, the artist stands alone, individual and triumphant. Both Edmond and Ashton-Warner, like Sargeson, use Art in a modernist fashion to redeem their lives, to give them shape and meaning. But each does this in a different way.

Edmond borrows the structure of the spiritual autobiography to divide her life into 'before' and 'after' the epiphany which she experiences. She has a domestic life and a literary life: like Sargeson, her life has a Part One and a Part Two. She also uses another, more societal narrative to shape her life. Edmond's frustration in her marriage, her epiphanic discovery of her lack of individuation, and her determination to make 'something else' of her life, to establish a separate identity for herself, are explicitly paralleled with the awakening feminist consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s. Her story is the history of an individual and at the same time representative of women's history, a woman's story and women's story. In the Author's Note she acknowledges: 'It has been a stirring experience to publish this story of a woman's life towards the end of a century which has so fundamentally changed women's circumstances and outlook.'

The obstacle or crisis which Sargeson must overcome is puritanism: for Edmond, the obstacle is her gender. The discovery of her identity as an artist, which in literary autobiography traditionally occurs during adolescence (for example, Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*) or in one's twenties (Sargeson), occurs later for Edmond because in her twenties she takes on the role of mother and wife. It is not until these roles are discarded (by means of her children leaving home, and her separation from her husband) that she can adopt the role of poet.

Ashton-Warner's autobiography also contains a moment of epiphany which confirms her decision to become a writer, but her narrative is not so explicitly bipartite in structure because throughout she always plays the role of 'the artist', even when she has other roles to occupy her time: mother, wife, teacher. Music, the visual arts, and literature are different talents that she is shown to possess, alternate paths simultaneously offered to her. She eventually chooses the latter path, although she always remains 'an artist' in the wider sense of the word. One of the main catchphrases in her educational

theories was 'supply the conditions ...' [and the child will read]: the main struggle Ashton-Warner faces is being able to find those conditions.

Her struggle is not as explicitly gendered as Edmond's, yet the conditions she needs (a quiet place to work, no other demands on her time) are those that Edmond lacks as a full-time wife and mother. The difference between them is that Ashton-Warner actively seeks out these conditions, setting up a place for herself known as 'Selah' wherever she lives, and leaving much of the day-to-day running of the household to her husband, while Edmond is more conventional, devoting her energies to looking after her husband and children, until a moment of epiphany illuminates her need for individuation.

In this chapter I want to show how the autobiographies are spiritual autobiographies, and how each autobiographer copes differently with the crises that face the female artist in New Zealand. In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* Lawrence Jones writes:

If Sargeson and Brasch present two ... tellings of the 'one story' of the artist's struggles with the puritanical society, viewed from the provincial perspective, Sylvia-Ashton Warner and Janet Frame present that story from a similar perspective, but ... with the additional complication that they were not only artists in an anti-aesthetic society but also women in a male-dominated one. (330)

Edmond too tells that 'one story' from a female perspective. Like Frame's, the first volume of her autobiography, and the early part of Ashton-Warner's, describes a specific type of childhood: the childhood of a female artist, which equally could be the childhood of a male artist. I want to show how both Edmond and Ashton-Warner represent this, in order to mark the point where their narratives diverge. How can Ashton-Warner sustain her identification as 'the artist', whereas Edmond is unable to?

II. Portrait of the artist as a child.

Edmond's portrait of the artist as a child traces her introduction to the world of language and literature. The first mention of her own poetry comes in Chapter 3 of *An Autobiography*, when she tells us:

I began to write poems and keep them, carefully printed in a black notebook with a shiny cover Staring was one of my chief occupations, and making something of what I saw a secret delight. Mum and Lindsay might see the poems when, rhymed and ready, they were copied into the black notebook, but nobody else. (16)

The paragraph immediately following in the text describes her encounter with a fairy.

It was round the side of the house that I saw my first and only fairy. It was quite close, sitting on a branch of one of the peach trees, dressed in pink as a fairy should be, with pink gauze wings and a very tiny face. As I watched her she got up slowly and flew to a higher branch where there were more leaves. I couldn't see her so well there, but it didn't matter; it had been an encounter of the profoundest pleasure, one I would never forget.

If these two events had been described in reverse order – if the manifestation of the fairy in the peach tree appeared in the paragraph *before* the first mention of Edmond's writing – and to an older subject, it would be possible to read the episode as epiphanic, especially since it is in the traditional location of a garden (Augustine's over-hearing of the command 'pick it up and read' occurs in a garden, Sargeson's epiphany in his uncle's orchard). However, although no explanation is given for the manifestation of the fairy, it inspires no sudden revelation. It is simply one of the many 'drifting reveries' in which both Lauris (and also her younger brother John, who 'had imaginary friends who became familiar to us' [17]) indulge when young. The fairy is a product of Edmond's childish imagination, but it specifically represents her capacity for artistic imagination, as Daphne Withers' vision of the 'tall gold flower' (33) sprouting out of a seedcake in Frame's first novel *Owls Do Cry* (1957) shows her to be an artist-figure,

able to alter reality, or see things as they are not. Edmond is writing herself as highly imaginative; writing her portrait of the artist as a young woman. Like Ashton-Warner in *I Passed This Way* (albeit more subtly), she is emphasising that she inherently possesses an artistic nature, even if she may go on to adopt other roles and occupations.

The 'fairy in the garden' scene may also be read as Edmond self-consciously playing with the conventions of the spiritual autobiography. Traditionally, revelation comes from God, or an angel, as in the annunciation (in Renaissance painting, this is often located in a garden). Edmond's little pink doll-like fairy in a tree is, similarly, a winged figure in a garden, but altered to be appropriate to the age of the protagonist. Another of the conventional 'rites of passage' or features of the spiritual autobiography occurs in the same chapter, when she mentions attending Anglican Sunday School and undergoing a sudden 'fit of intense religious fervour' in which she 'reproached [her] mother for never having had [her and her siblings] christened' (19). Edmond's subsequent christening is marred by her giggling, but her description of the event is followed by a recollection of '[t]he nearest thing [she] had to a revelation':

[It] happened when I was in bed one night, lying awake tormented by the impossibility of ever being good enough – not only good enough to please Mum, but *good*. I knew I wasn't. Lindsay was, but not me. ... I thought despairingly about all this, and then over the pine trees across the road ... came a huge yellow full moon. ... It had a dense if shadowy population on it; they seemed to be standing up, and the closer they came the more it seemed that they stood round the central figure of God, sitting on His throne. I could not bear it; there was no doubt that this was the Second Coming, and that all the evil in my heart would be revealed to the remorseless eyes of the Lord and His angels. I would wake up in the morning and find myself dead, and would have to begin at once on my eternal damnation. (19-20)

Edmond's despair that she will never be 'good' may be compared to Sargeson's realisation that he will never become 'a sort of imitation Christ'. In any autobiography with the narrative structure of spiritual autobiography, such a moment is important because it denotes a turn in the outlook of the protagonist away from organised religion,

and the subsequent finding or forming of identity elsewhere. When it happens to Sargeson he is able, in retrospect, to pinpoint that moment as the first time he thought of becoming a writer. However, there is an important distinction to be made between the two writers. Religion did not have the same influence on Edmond's childhood and adolescence as it did Sargeson's. The scene is another example of Edmond writing herself as 'the artist as a child', with a highly imaginative and creative sensibility.

It is also another example of Edmond, as she did before by locating her vision of a fairy in a garden, deliberately playing with an autobiographical convention which since Joyce has been sanctioned as part of the literary autobiography: the moment when the subject of the autobiography rejects God and Christian identity, paving the way for their identity to be formed as an artist. Edmond includes this scene *despite* not having demonstrated any serious religious belief in herself or her parents. There is no sense, as there is in Sargeson's autobiography, for example, of Edmond being strongly influenced by Christian belief, and thus there is really no need for her to reject this, which the scene symbolically does. It is as if she is borrowing a convention that she sees as part of a writer's journey on the way to becoming an artist, using the conventional features and experiences found in the spiritual autobiography to give weight to her literary autobiography.

Ashton-Warner's formation of the artist as a child does not toy with these traditional features, nor is it as genre-specific. When she wins money in a drawing competition she states that '[s]uch easily won, joyfully won money confirmed to me I'd be an artist the moment I got out into the world' (54), aligning her artistic nature with the visual arts. Yet music is another love ('If this was a sonata,' she says a little later, 'then I'd be a great pianist when I grew up and spend my life at the keyboard' [69]), and she also writes juvenilia. This trinity of options (painter, musician, author) is aligned in her imagination under the banner of 'the artist':

My solitary mind was a boundless scape full of the things I wanted. Sometimes they took the form of poems composed when wheeling my bike up hills inside the curtains of rain, and of pictures which shouted for paint, and predatory sentimental melodies, all to be realised per colour and keyboard in Mumma's schoolroom at the weekend (101).

Her nature is confirmed for her by her mother who says early on: “‘I’ve just chased an artist out of the house”’ (141). This maternal confirmation is significant, for Ashton-Warner returns to it twice later in the text, when her mother tells her husband “‘Sylvie’s an artist, Keith”’ (to which he replies “‘I know She should not have married”’ [315]), and at a dinner party with friends:

John halts his knife and fork and says squarely, sanely,
“Sylvia, are you an artist?”

... A pseudo-artist would giggle, evade the point and
play coy, but I’ve got to be true to myself. Cost what it
may. “Yes.”

It’s the other family who giggle and smirk.
Philistines. But not John and not Leslie either. ... “How do
you know?” from John.

“My mother told me.” (345)

In *Sylvia! The Biography of Sylvia-Ashton-Warner* (1988), Lynley Hood shows that as the seemingly least remarkable child in a large family, Ashton-Warner often felt overshadowed by other, more popular siblings. This is confirmed in the autobiography: less explicit is Hood’s hypothesis that Ashton-Warner felt unloved by her parents. Perhaps her mother did make a remark about her being an artist, to which she clung as a means of self-identification. But this is psychological speculation. What is undeniable is the way that Ashton-Warner conceived her identity from an early stage to be that of ‘the artist’, whether as poet, pianist, or painter.

Both Edmond and Ashton-Warner retain their artistic inclinations into adolescence, although unlike Ashton-Warner, Edmond does not see art as a viable career option. When she begins high school, she mentions a girl, Daisy, who out of all her other friends has ‘the clearest sense of her future She was going to be a novelist. In fact she had already written most of her first book, and could and did tell us about it’ (38-39).
Edmond

secretly thought it silly, but admired unreservedly the
purposefulness of her ambition. My writing of poems was

nothing like that, and I never mentioned it; it was clear that Daisy was a real writer and I was not. (39)

By comparison, Ashton-Warner at about the same age has an artistic future all mapped out for herself.

Perhaps it was time to run away [from home and school]. Stake out my territory in some far-fabled city and start on my real work. It would have to begin with commercial art which paid since the real stuff didn't. And what was to stop me continuing lessons ... to become a concert pianist? Think of it. A studio of my own and sweet new friends. What I would buy first would be a frying pan, a pound of sausages, a teapot, a cup and saucer. Felicity. (126)

Ashton-Warner may have her path planned down her to home comforts, but in reality she continues into the sixth form because 'Mumma ... wanted me to get Higher Leaving Certificate and become another teacher'. Though a 'pariah' (112) at school, she finds the end of year prizegiving a triumph when she wins the most coveted award, the Wairarapa Essay Prize, and is told "[k]eep on writing," (138) by the Minister of Education, Sir James Parr.

In her second year at Teachers' College in Wellington, Edmond takes advantage of the literary opportunities offered to her, which are primarily critical and editorial. She writes reviews and articles for the college monthly *Student Opinion* (describing the editor's 'literary ability and judgement [as] hopeless' [93]) and the university fortnightly newspaper *Salient*. She also becomes editor of the annual College magazine *Ako Pai*. Drama is another love continued from her childhood, and she is involved in a variety of dramatic productions. Bruce Mason is a fellow student, and later when she moves to Christchurch she is part of a touring group directed by Ngaio Marsh. There is little mention, however, of any creative writing during this tertiary period.

While Ashton-Warner trains to be a teacher, first spending a year as a pupil teacher before attending college, she retains the dream of becoming an artist: 'I'd find myself one day outside of repeating schoolrooms, out of reach of a watchful matron, clear of an infant mistress, and here was the studio with paint and a piano, the teapot and cup

and saucer, the frying pan and sausages, one bed and only me there' (158). Returning from school one day she wonders: 'Where was the great artist I was going to be?' (173), and impulsively enters an advertising agency to ask if they will offer her a job as a commercial artist. She is told that, at seventeen, she is too old to begin training, and leaves disappointed.

Importantly, art is figured not only as her preferred career, but specifically as her 'escape from teaching' (174), which she refers to throughout the autobiography as 'the bloody profesh'.² Ashton-Warner has entered teacher training in the footsteps of her mother (a rare teacher as well as mother because of her husband's illness and early death), but art recurs as a salvation from this fate. One summer holiday at home she sets up a desk and

said I was going to write a book. I didn't consider writing to be in my line but since art and music had fallen through, temporarily, I'd have to try something else and if I failed all the way I'd end up at the Wellington Training College to be a dreary teacher, sufficient reason to make anyone write anything....

I wrote not one word of any book but in time ... silence evoked an idea which all but felled me: instead of writing a book I wrote a letter to the education department in Wellington applying to be zoned at the Auckland Training College. I ... said I wished to attend the Elam School of Art What I avoided telling them was that in this way I might extricate myself from the bloody profesh and move into commercial art. (182)

Her application is accepted, but the move still does not open doors to an artistic career. However, she receives 95 percent for an essay on Rousseau which recalls the glory of the Wairarapa Essay Prize, and as before, this institutional affirmation of her writing sees literature edge forward as the preferred option of the trinity of art, music, and writing. There are other options, such as swimming (Ashton-Warner was a strong swimmer at

² This phrase is first used, in quotation marks, on p.141. Similarities could be drawn between Ashton-Warner and Frame, who continues into her senior years at high school because her parents plan that she will be a teacher, and attends Teachers' College, but still conceives of herself as a poet, with writing her 'real' career.

high school, but this dream is dashed when she is beaten by someone much faster) and marriage (the ideology of the time was that women should marry and have children), but

as the other escape hatches edged shut about me ... leaving
only the bloody profesh, here was the same skylight
inching open again as it had in the dark past: writing. (196)

Ashton-Warner has one last try at making a career out of visual art. When college finishes she remains in Auckland instead of going home for the summer, sets up her flat as a studio, and lives out her romantic conception of 'the artist', putting together a folio that she believes will ensure her a job as a commercial artist. She is a 'solitary artist', a 'genuine absent-minded artist': her actions give back her 'self-respect' and '[c]onfidence' (221). When her work is rejected she even 'beg[ins] to starve ... in true garret style' (222), carries on until she becomes sick, and sends home a note representing her failure: "Ill and starving please send fare"(222).

Already, distinctions may be drawn between Edmond's portrait of the artist as a child and adolescent, and Ashton-Warner's. Both are artistic children: the former's main interest is in writing poetry; the latter writes, paints, and plays the piano. However, from an early age, Ashton-Warner connects her identity to that of 'the artist', while Edmond is more conventional, less sure about applying that label to herself. She does not see herself as a 'real' poet, as her friend Daisy is a 'real' writer. When they leave school and begin teacher training, Ashton-Warner holds on to her artist's identity, trying to find work as a commercial artist, and even living as a starving artist in a garret, until reality sets in and she is forced to abandon this dream. By contrast, although Edmond is actively involved in a variety of creative pursuits while at Teachers' College and University, art does not play the same role in her life, or her conception of her identity. This difference prefigures how Edmond and Ashton-Warner adapt differently to marriage and motherhood. As they enter this state, only Ashton-Warner is aware that being a wife and mother may threaten her existence as an artist.

III. Men, marriage, and the pervasiveness of social ideologies.

Ashton-Warner's failure to survive as an artist is shown in the autobiography to be a major crisis. As a result of trying to live like an artist she has fallen ill, but she is also faced with the dilemma of what to do with her life. With the option of earning her living by art, her preferred means, gone, she enters a period of stasis which reads like depression.

There are months and months or more round here I cannot account for; such a blank on the walls of the gallery of memory there must have been a blank on the walls of life there too. I don't recall mourning over no job, no money, no friends, no Floyd [her boyfriend], no clothes, no strength, no hope, no nothing.... All of which maybe is the way the soul heals itself: a black night of surcease. (223)

She is drawn out of this state by a man; a visit from 'Floyd Duckmanton' (whom Hood tells us was in fact an amalgamated personality of several men she dated while she lived in Auckland),³ comparatively wealthy and flamboyant and always contrasted against the steady Keith Henderson with whom she has already discussed engagement and marriage. With no other options seemingly available to her now her career as an artist has failed, and not wanting to be a teacher, she 'go[es] through the motions' (227) of preparing for marriage by assembling pieces for her glory box, and less than fifteen pages after the arrival of Floyd lifts her out of her depression, is married to Keith, 'since [she] no longer saw any reason not to.'⁴

Ashton-Warner's former dream of being an artist with her own studio to work in was specific on her solitude, being alone to create her art. It was a dream that competed

³ *Sylvia!*, 62.

⁴ *Sylvia!*, 229. Hood suggests that they married earlier than planned (originally they had planned to wait two years before getting engaged, and then another two before marrying) because Ashton-Warner faked pregnancy. Hood emphasises the sudden nature of the wedding, and that Ashton-Warner only devoted one paragraph of her autobiography to describing it, and then says: 'If this book were a novel the writer would unpick the embroidery from Sylvia's account, snip off the flawed strands and rework the original threads into an alternative version of the marriage. The plot would go something like this ...' (67). Hood then gives '*The story so far*', indented from the main text, in suitable Mills and Boon vocabulary, and proposes her account of the phantom pregnancy, before saying: 'But this isn't a novel. So we just have to note that Sylvia is concealing something about her wedding. And we don't know what it is.'

with her peers' dreams of men and marriage because 'there was no man in it' (158). At the same time, however, Ashton-Warner still has a standard, romantic dream in which

I'd meet the man of all men, tall as usual, dark handsome and rich, who'd fall madly in love with me. In a soul-shaking scene he'd propose to me, I'd become engaged with a diamond ring sparkling for all to see and be married in yards of white satin and a veil. ... Both dreams were doing well though entirely unrelated to each other. (158-59)

Significantly, her conception of the roles of artist and wife is that they are irreconcilable. She may have one or the other: to have both is not possible. When she falls in love, the studio dream is replaced by the marriage dream. Yet she is still aware that the former offers a freedom which the latter doesn't: 'It's not love my goal; it's freedom' (217). Her marriage to Keith, although it offers her emotional and financial security, spells an end to this freedom. Throughout her autobiography, Ashton-Warner reveres spinsters, or unmarried women who dedicate their lives to teaching or nursing ('they have everything to give, and they give it' [152]), because they have a freedom which as a married woman she lacks.⁵

Like Ashton-Warner's, Edmond's autobiography reflects the social ideology of the time in regard to her conception of the limited roles available to women. In fact, there were only two: one either got married and had children, thus giving up one's career, or remained unmarried, and worked as a teacher, a nurse, or another such socially acceptable occupation. While at Teachers' College, Edmond plays the expected female role, which is to 'catch herself a man'.

[W]e always wear our best things to dazzle Sandy. We spend quite a lot of time you know in vigorous and highly diverting rivalry over the poor little thing. (56)

This means acting as if she is brainless:

wouldn't I just sell all my intelligence in a moment to be rid of this shyness and have a bit of sex appeal instead (60),

for her autobiography shows that at this time men perceived themselves as intellectually superior.

[I]n spite of everything [Sandy's] like other men, and underneath thinks women are just to look at and play with and talk nonsense to. I'm beginning to see it as part of the great obstacle women have in front of them wherever they turn. (65)

Edmond finds this assumption infuriating, yet her knowledge of her expected role in society means that she has internalised this mindset, saying: 'Leisure time here is often painful because of the futility of the women' (59).

Edmond is showing us how she was expected to behave as a young, marriagable woman in society: how she was aware of her role, and how she played it, although it infuriated her at times. She does not admit to dreaming about marriage; she even makes self-disparaging reference to becoming an unmarried teacher, one of the spinsters whom Ashton-Warner revered. In a letter home to her family she describes:

unmarried school teachers when they get to the stage of having sporty clothes and lots of make-up and brown faces and that huntress's look when men are about, and bright forced smiles and lots of conversation and the air of clinging to straws . . . you'd better not send Lindsay [her sister] to college after all, one of those is enough in any family. (102-03)

This is despite the fact that at this time she is exchanging letters with Trevor Edmond, whom she met in her first year in Wellington. When Trevor returns in December 1944 from serving with the air force they become engaged, and are married.

The generation's sensibilities towards the limited roles available to women are also recorded in Janet Frame's autobiography. Frame (b.1924) was an exact

⁵ Her first novel was *Spinster: A Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), republished as *Spinster* by Heinemann (London, 1972).

contemporary of Edmond.⁶ Like Edmond, she comments on the war-time scarcity of men at university, and the way those remaining are 'quickly claimed' by the best-looking women, 'while the rest, [herself] among them, survived by daydreaming of what might be and by concentrating admiration on the most handsome lecturers'.⁷ Frame continues:

In complete ignorance of the ways of love and sex, I watched with envious wonder the lives of those women who, finding their 'man', fulfilled not only their own expectations but those of their family and friends and thus added a bloom of certainty to their being. (157)

In Frame's record of her experience there is not the same sense of women being seen and treated by their male peers as intellectually inferior as there is in Edmond's autobiography. However, there is the same reinforcement of the social ideology of the time in regard to the limited occupations available to women.

In *Curved Horizon: An Autobiography* (1991), Ruth Dallas (b.1919) confirms the expectation of women to marry and have children, describing the period when she grew up as one in which marriage 'was a woman's time-consuming occupation in life' (53): 'it was accepted by society and the women themselves that a woman's place was in the home' (103). Dallas says 'it was taken for granted that [she] would follow in [her sisters'] footsteps and have children' (68), and of the often arduous work she undertakes during World War Two when women were 'manpowered' to perform traditionally male occupations, she writes: 'I worked hard and grew very fit, no doubt using the energy that in peacetime would have been used in raising a family' (76). Dallas never marries, although she gives the strong expectation that she would have had not her boyfriend met someone else while serving overseas and broken off their engagement. No other man is mentioned as a possible subsequent partner, although Charles Brasch, whom she helped to produce *Landfall*, is a central figure in the autobiography, at times dwarfing the subject herself. Dallas is one of Ashton-Warner's revered spinsters, who plays a socially

⁶ In her poem 'Late Talk for Janet Frame' Edmond describes herself and Frame as 'two women born in the same year (each / to a talkative mother), each, more than half / a century ago, creeping over childhood's / frightening playgrounds, faces usually / averted – and each, it seems, engaged / in stately tournaments of the mind'. *The Inward Sun: Celebrating the Life and Work of Janet Frame*, ed. Elizabeth Alley (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1994), 38.

⁷ *An Autobiography*, 153-54.

accepted role by staying at home and looking after her elderly mother, the traditional occupation of the unmarried daughter.

The autobiographies of Edmond, Dallas, Frame, and Ashton-Warner all record the limited options available to women in New Zealand in the 1940s and 50s, even the 1960s. The next part of this discussion will look at how marriage and motherhood are shown by both Ashton-Warner and Edmond to be incompatible with being an artist. This is one obstacle that the female artist must overcome: motherhood in particular is a specifically gendered state which inhibits the normal progression of the spiritual autobiography.

IV. Epiphany.

After the crisis of failing as an artist, followed by her sudden marriage to Keith, Ashton-Warner glosses over '[f]ive years and two babies later' (244) in less than a sentence. After being a mother and teacher's wife for five years, she is now 'prepared to go teaching again', because

my soul has dissolved like soap in hot water and gurgled
down the plug in the wash-house.

This desire, at a time when 'married women were not ... employed' (231), shows that Ashton-Warner was not as conventional as other wives, not as swayed by the social ideologies of the time. This may have been largely due to her childhood, in which the normal parental roles of the time were reversed.

For one thing our father was known to be a cripple, a rank disgrace since nice fathers could not only walk but went out to work on their legs without crutches. Next, our mother was a teacher who went out to work instead, which was ranker still since nice mothers were to be found in their kitchens making cakes all day. (26)

In wanting to continue her career after she became a mother, Ashton-Warner had her mother as a role model. Her husband Keith is more conventional in regards to a woman's

role, as well as his own. His initial response to his wife's demand ("It will never be said of me that I can't keep my wife and family"[244]) shows that society also had very fixed expectations of a man's role, yet Hood traces the way in which Keith took on his wife's 'duties' as 'nurturer' as well as retaining his status as 'provider', in order to give her time to pursue her art.⁸ Ashton-Warner persuades her husband to apply for a Maori school, the only schools at that time which would accept a teaching couple. That this necessitates a move to an extremely remote area shows the extent of Ashton-Warner's frustrations with the limited nature of her life. Teaching, which she hated, would however give her some autonomy, some extension to her life as wife and mother.

The move to Horoera has mixed consequences. While in therapy, Ashton-Warner is asked by her psychologist if she knows 'what' she is. The response, that she is an artist, and not a teacher, is predictable. Yet Dr Allen then asks her, "Do you *want* to know what you are?" (282), and is told: "You're a writer." This moment is not an epiphany, but it is shown to be an important turning-point, like the confirmation of her writer-identity that Frame receives in the Maudsley Institute in London. The testimony of Hood concurs with Ashton-Warner's on the significance of the 'discovery'. Hood shows that Ashton-Warner cherished the idea of becoming an artist from a young girl, which for her encompassed writing, painting, and music. Out of this, 'the ambition to become a writer gradually took root' (27). However, the psychologist's intervention was important: 'Dr Allen's most positive contribution was to encourage Sylvia to write' (84). Yet once Ashton-Warner recovers from her breakdown, she returns to teaching, although she still considers herself an artist, and continues with her writing, painting, and music in the space of her own known as 'Selah' which she sets up wherever she lives, as well as the classroom when she is able.

The moment where she chooses writing as the vehicle to concentrate her artistic talents follows the usual form of the epiphany in spiritual autobiography. Indeed, her version is in some ways more traditional than Sargeson's, because the decision is shown to be directly sanctioned by God.

⁸ Hood writes that '[c]onventional people were deeply offended' by this, for 'the role reversal in the Henderson household was a terrible threat to the status quo; in post-war New Zealand, men were expected to be absorbed in their work, while child care and housework was left to their self-effacing wives' (115).

The actual moment of decision is shown through a literary device. The title *I Passed This Way* is a metaphor for the journey of her life, and the imagery of travel recurs throughout. For example, train stations, representing in one place arrivals from other places, and departures to further places, become a regular motif. The moment where Ashton-Warner's artistic options are narrowed down to writing is figured as arriving at an important crossroads. This is her version of her decision to become a writer in the autobiography:

In ... the terrible thirties, I looked the whole thing in the face and tried to work it out At this intersection in the journey, detours lured all ways; art, music, writing or teaching and a big road sign with an arrow pointed to FEARFUL FORTIES AHEAD, and another read DECISIONS HERE. A road patrol on a horse advised briskly, And don't be too long about it. And get it right first time. You pass this way but once.

... By the wayside was a long open shed with the words CHECK EQUIPMENT HERE so I went in.... I took things out of my haversack....

... Art. Plenty there but functional only. Home-brewed. Music? ... All I had was the fever of the passion, unable to control the momentum of practice....

As for my poor old teaching, an excellent source of income no doubt but not my chosen work. On the other hand, it called on and mopped up everything I had Well, my record at the department supported what I'd always known myself, that I'd never be a good teacher

Which left only writing, the last in the running, with its accompaniment, study True, I'd had but one short story actually published but I'd got the message.... Writing siphoned off the effervescence of dreaming

Replacing my gear in the haversack, I returned to the crossroads. After all, one did have a choice and I'd take the writing road. (346-47)

This is not a traditional moment of epiphany. Ashton-Warner is not, for example, out for a stroll when a vision of a crossroads suddenly appears to her. And nothing happens afterwards to confirm this decision, in the way that Stephen Dedalus' is confirmed, or Sargeson's. So where does this come from, and why is it epiphanic?

Immediately before, in *I Passed This Way*, is a short paragraph describing the dinner party where she affirms to the guests, in response to one's query, that yes, she is an artist. Before this is a paragraph following in the tradition of Gerald Manley Hopkins, whom Ashton-Warner has been reading. As she says: '[Hopkins] is very good company when consulting your instincts' (345). The passage reads:

... Why, I challenge God in mind, have you apportioned me
gifts when you won't let me use them?

He replies willingly enough, Because I like my
tools sharp.

But I'm no tool of yours.

It's not, He says, for you mortals to say. It's I who
chooses the steel I want, and I who tempers it in the
furnace.

But I spend half my time in the furnace, God. What for?

Because, He says, you're such substandard metal.

Then why bother with me?

There's work to be done, of course.

Well, can't you pick on somebody else?

Many are called but few are chosen.

Ashton-Warner is preparing to consult her instincts, to narrow down her artistic options and fix on one. But what has brought this on? Before this in the text is Ashton-Warner's experience of seeing and meeting a real live artist, the pianist Lili Kraus. Kraus's talent and glamour, two things which Ashton-Warner has long associated with her conception of 'the artist', leave a strong impression on her, and this leads her to scrutinise her talents so that she too can become an admired artist like Kraus.

So we have this sequence: Ashton-Warner meets Lili Kraus; she mentions Gerald Manley Hopkins and apostrophises God in a conversation regarding her 'gifts' (her artistic talents) and her time in the 'furnace' (her struggles with teaching and fulfilling her roles of wife, mother, and artist), and is told '[t]here's work to be done.... [m]any are called but few are chosen.' Ashton-Warner's figuring of herself as one chosen by God is equivalent to Sargeson's epiphanic afternoon in his uncle's orchard. She is shown to be special, set apart, one of the few. Immediately after this is the dinner party where she admits to her identity as an artist, followed by the figurative crossroads scene where she selects from her options the path of a writer.

A comparison of Hood's version of Ashton-Warner's decision to become a writer shows Ashton-Warner's account to be a highly literary construct, as King's biography shows Sargeson's account to be fictional. Ashton-Warner, unlike Sargeson, did not have anything to hide. Yet she uses the spiritual autobiographical form for the same reasons: to elevate her status above others', to validate her decision to become a writer, to organise her life around the redeeming principle of Art. Ashton-Warner writes herself as one 'chosen' by God in the way that epiphany in the traditional spiritual autobiography comes directly from God.⁹

Hood's version of the decision shows it to be a more prosaic calculation of her talents, brought about by her awareness of her age: in particular, the deep hereditary wrinkles that begin to appear when she is approaching 40.

[D]espite the superficial glamour, she had to face the truth: she was growing old. Time was running out. Her sister Grace had died in South Africa, her brother Ashton had died in Wellington. Her own 'terrible thirties' had come to an end. She needed to firm up the philosophy and direction of her life, and press on urgently with her work.

... She surveyed her talents. She found that her art was purely functional and her music lacked discipline. She resolved to focus on one major goal: to become a writer. She began to see this as an alternative career through which she could escape from her love-hate relationship with teaching.

She reworked incidents from her diary into short stories and submitted them to the *New Zealand Listener*. Initially her efforts were rejected, but in October 1948 she saw her first publication, a Pipiriki story, 'No Longer Blinded By Our Eyes'. (127)

Lauris Edmond also uses the literary conventions of the spiritual autobiography to mark a significant moment in her self-conception. The epiphany she experiences,

⁹ In *Sylvia!* Hood traces Ashton-Warner's somewhat ambiguous relationship with God. At one point when she is feeling lonely, 'in her despair she wrote to God' (156) in her diary, addressing him as in the Manley Hopkins-like passage above: 'still supposing that you have a use for me'. Later Hood says Ashton-Warner had a 'love-hate relationship with God' (161), which was confronted in her novel *Incense to Idols* (1960) through the character Anna Vorontosov. To one reviewer of the novel Ashton-Warner wrote: 'God actually was my mate when I was working', implying a relationship which has many similarities to Frame's with the Envoy from Mirror City (see Chapter 3 below).

however, is more closely aligned with the modernist, Joycean epiphany that Stephen Dedalus and Sargeson describe, in that its origins are more mysterious.

At the beginning of *Bonfires in the Rain*, volume 2 of Edmond's autobiography, she records her 'pervasive satisfaction at having achieved the married state – and status – that every girl unconsciously desired' (130). The volume is about marriage and motherhood. For the first time she finds that her identity is dependent on another: her husband. As a married woman she does not have an 'I', she is part of a 'we': she is 'the other half' (135). As her identity as a wife is clearly defined, so are her duties, and in performing the household duties while at the same time continuing to teach, there is no time for writing. Once she gives up teaching to become a mother, she never returns to it.

After the birth of her first child, when she is aged 23, she begins to write again, first keeping a diary: 'Bits of poems and stories I scrawled between the green covers too' (163). Literary dreams of her childhood begin to resurface. She even says: 'there was plenty of time to become a real New Zealand poet because there had been hardly any women since Katherine Mansfield'. Yet at all times a strict discrepancy is retained between her public role of mother and wife and her private identity as writer. Writing is 'a completely private act' (164) from which her husband is excluded. Around the same time, however, she comes across the New Zealand journal *Landfall* and her 'secret desire to be a writer' (165) takes on another dimension when she recognises her literary ambitions. These become clear to her when her first story is published in the *Listener*: 'In one swoop my vague and uncertain literary ambitions cohered, became a solid, accomplished fact' (184).

Still, her writing is restricted due to the time requirements of her foremost occupation of looking after her children, her home, and her husband. She is able to write only for short periods in the afternoons while her children are asleep. And it remains a private act; the one person she shows her work to is her mother. It is a 'secret vice' (190) kept from Trevor. As she compared herself disparagingly to Daisy the third-form novelist earlier, she still does not see herself as a 'real' writer, nor her writing 'real' writing: 'I want to become a real writer and these snatches are a kind of practice.' Yet there is one setback: 'Nobody would or could disagree that my main occupation was fully formed' (190).

Edmond is making it impossible for the reader not to be aware that although destined to be an artist – as her writing of her childhood as a portrait of the artist as a young woman makes clear – she does not fulfil this promise earlier because it conflicted with the expected female role. Edmond, like Frame, Dallas, and Ashton-Warner shows the expectations on women to marry: like Ashton-Warner, she fulfils these expectations, which Frame and Dallas do not (the former due to institutionalisation, the latter never marries), having their first work published much earlier as a result.¹⁰ By showing how pervasive gender roles were in society, Edmond defends her late reincarnation as artist.

Retrospectively, she takes care in her writing to emphasise that she did not regret marriage and motherhood, saying: ‘I lived richly and fully in those years, and scarcely even noticed the absence of any separate adult life I might have had up till then’ (220). Her comment prefigures a graphic illustration of this lack of individuation which will occur later in the text. She suffers strain, which she experiences as a ‘choking sensation’ (222), and tries to overcome this by becoming more active. Her selfless role of mother and wife is having a cumulative effect. She writes: ‘I did not for some years realise how superficial this managerial equilibrium really was, nor how damaging in that it induced a kind of internal paralysis from which eventually I must consciously recover’ (223). Soon after, Edmond directly comments on her expected role.

I was moving into the middle of my life – soon I would be forty. And I was not, so far, a writer of poems or stories, a known recorder of New Zealand experience; instead I was a mother of six children, a woman who had taken up the familiar pattern of my generation. Certainly I had expanded it – no family I knew had so many children ... but I hadn’t otherwise changed or challenged the conventions I’d inherited. I didn’t think of this regretfully, I simply observed it with a small detached surprise (227).

¹⁰ Frame, b.1924: first publication *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951), published while she was in hospital, followed by *Owls Do Cry* (1957). Dallas, b.1919: first volume *Country Road and Other Poems* (1953). Compare with Edmond, b.1924: *In Middle Air* (1975), and Ashton-Warner, b.1908: *Spinster* (1958). This sample suggests that the average age for an unmarried woman’s first publication was 30: a married women’s was more than 20 years older than this, at 50, around the onset of menopause and when her children would have likely left home.

One summer when the family is camping in Napier she experiences an event which ‘as time passed proved to have been the beginning of a profound and enduring change’ (243).

One afternoon I sat in the tent alone and watched the family out in the grass playing cricket with their father. I often elected to stay in or about the tent instead of romping about with bats and balls because it was a chance to feed, even temporarily, my permanently unsatisfied craving to read I turned my pages peacefully, then at a sudden shout looked up, and as I watched a kind of somersault took place in my mind. The figures moving about on that green background suddenly changed, took on a new angle, almost a new dimension. I saw them as I never had before – they were my dearest people in all the world, almost everything I thought and did was directed towards their welfare, their happiness and fulfilment. And I saw with blinding clarity that not one of them thought there was a single thing to be done for me, in my turn. I didn’t have a turn. I didn’t exist, except as I helped them to exist. Without them I was nothing, and so they perceived me – theirs, useful, indeed necessary, loved of course, depended upon; but as a person with possible separate requirements of my own, not there. And nobody, not even I, thought this unbalanced or wrong. I shook all over, that moment in a hot afternoon, I was so struck by the momentousness of the discovery. It must have happened gradually – was that why I had seen nothing of it till this instant? It was not even as though a major cathartic event had shed light on it; this was a peaceful day with everything perfectly in order. Perhaps it was an idea, a little nub of knowledge, that had been waiting just outside consciousness for a very long time and, catching me off guard, quickly and quietly entered.

(243-44)

Edmond’s epiphany – for that is what it is - does not involve a mysterious manifestation, as Sargeson one afternoon in his uncle’s orchard experiences an *earlier* afternoon in his uncle’s orchard, or Stephen in the semi-autobiographical novel *Portrait of An Artist As A Young Man* seems to see Daedalus flying, or in Mansfield’s short story ‘Prelude’ Linda Burnell sees a ship in place of an aloe tree. It is, rather, a classic example of a revelation

which occurs suddenly, unexpectedly, inexplicably out of everyday experience, as in *Stephen Hero* Stephen informs his friend Cranly that an object as prosaic as the town-clock may induce an epiphany. Edmond even emphasises the normality of the day on which it occurs ('a peaceful day with everything perfectly in order'), and the humbleness of the surroundings – watching her family play cricket on holiday in Napier. The only way in which it differs from the traditional literary epiphany is that rather than inducing a realisation of self-identity, as Sargeson's and Stephen Dedalus' cement their identity as artists, it induces a realisation of a *lack* of self-identity.

Edmond's epiphany causes her to realise that she has no individual identity apart from fulfilling society's expectations of a woman's role. She may deny that the incident is a 'major cathartic event', but the realisation that comes to her while watching her family play cricket changes the direction of the rest of her life. Just as Sargeson's epiphany in the orchard at the end of volume 1 of his autobiography is the structural climax of the book, so is Edmond's epiphany a major turning-point in the narrative of her autobiography, the point at which she sets out to discover an individual identity for herself, which leads to her renaissance as a poet.

After the epiphany, Edmond enrolls at Massey University and finishes her degree. In this environment she becomes aware of the despair of other women trapped at home with their children, and feminist literature reinforces her discovery on an international scale.

Thousands of women all over America were saying in interviews again and again that their families were well, happy, busy fulfilling their ambitions, their husbands likewise, and yet beneath this apparently perfect façade they themselves suffered a profound and inexplicable malaise. Extraordinary as it was, it seemed that at the same moment women thousands of miles apart were coming to exactly the same conclusion. Years of patient dedication to one's husband and children, the best and happiest kind of life, appeared to have an unpleasant secret hidden within it, and like parallel inventors we had unknowingly come upon it at the same time. (245)

Retrospectively, Edmond shows her behaviour, and her husband's,¹¹ to be part of a larger social condition. She is using social history to show that their behaviour was representative of other men and women's; that they behaved as they did because socially they were conditioned to.

I ... began to come across the idea that after the war there had been a period of settled values, for men devotion to 'getting on' within whatever system they knew, for women home and children. Now that it was all breaking up, it seemed analysts could see it as a pattern. (280)

In 'Only Connect: The Making of an Autobiography', an essay by Edmond in *Landfall* about her autobiographical project, Edmond is explicit about using her personal story as representative of others. She writes:

Other women's experience offered parallels, but mine seemed a particularly clear-cut, not to say dramatic example of what I was coming to see as a phenomenon of my generation. (248)

Edmond's story of her individuation is not just a portrait of the artist. Gender (or more specifically, socially constructed gender roles) is shown to be the major obstacle that she faces on the path to becoming an artist: gender is the focus of her spiritual crisis. However, by positioning herself as representative of the awakening feminist consciousness, she is paralleling her behaviour with others': her story is as much 'women's story' as it is 'artist's story'. Aston-Warner's story, by contrast, is not so concerned with gender, because she conceives of her identity as an artist before all else.¹²

¹¹ As she conforms to conventional female roles and duties, Edmond shows how her husband also conformed to a specific gendered behaviour. Trevor also sustains damage from internalising the conventions of the time: in his case, the postwar puritan work ethic, or ensuring the economic stability of his family by concentrating his energies on his job. While he is initially happy just teaching, he soon becomes ambitious, working constantly to achieve higher gradings and teaching positions which will advance his career. Applying for one such job, he has a breakdown after his successful interview. He is hospitalised and undergoes psychiatric treatment, receiving ECT, the standard treatment of the time. He recovers but the mindset which caused his breakdown has not been altered. He immediately returns to concentrate on his career, becoming head of the PPTA.

¹² Ashton-Warner's gender did however affect her standing in the educational and literary worlds. She sees her main obstacle in the Education Department as 'the 'PBSMEH – the Permanent Solid Block of Male Educational Hostility', and describes the 'underground stream of hostility [that] swirled round from N.Z.

Edmond resumes writing after her epiphany, but 'for the first time with absolute seriousness' (264). The worlds of public and private collude as she finally admits her 'secret' occupation. 'It was as though some voice in me said, at last, 'To hell with it all, this is what I want to do' – and I did it' (264-65). Chapter 32 ends with the author musing on the sort of person her husband wants her to be: '*perhaps that's what I used to be!*' (273). She begins to make contacts in the literary world, becomes editor of the PPTA journal, and is entrusted by Glover to edit Fairburn's letters. Her first volume of poetry, *In Middle Air*, is published in 1975. Volume 2 of her autobiography ends with her pinning her identity on her writing: 'I knew that however damaged, however incomplete I felt myself to be, this new work, my own writing, was the beginning of my next journey' (291).

Like Sargeson's, Edmond's life is divided into two parts: her 'before' life, her 'Part One' life as a mother and a wife, and her 'after' or literary life, her 'Part Two' life, which coincides with the breakdown of her marriage. Volume 3 of her autobiography, *The Quick World*, sees her striking out to find her own separate self, as a single woman, and as a writer, beginning with a solo trip overseas, as Ashton-Warner also travels overseas after her husband's death. The prevailing imagery is of fragmentation, induced by the death of Edmond's daughter Rachel, and the continued disintegration of her marriage: she speaks of her 'increasingly separate selves', her 'divided self'; of her life 'breaking up like an iceberg into separate floes which in turn took off and connected with others, none knowing their final shape.'¹³ At the same time, however, she is moving 'towards the first truly individual life [she] had known' (318).

As yet, Lauris Edmond has not been the subject of a biography. However, an examination of the epiphany which she shows to have divided her life shows it to have

men educators and teachers from the director down' (356) on the publication of *Spinster*. In the literary world she was also disadvantaged by her gender. Lawrence Jones tells us that 'the New Zealand literary world, dominated by male rebels against their society, did not grant this female rebel status. More than Robin Hyde, who had at least an equivocal place on the edge of the male literary world, she was on the outside, ... and even after she had achieved world attention rare for a writer, ignored in literary journals. The one substantial attempt to come to terms with her work, an article by Dennis McEldowney in *Landfall* in September 1969, was attacked by Brasch in a letter in the next issue' (*Barbed Wire and Mirrors*, 331-32).

¹³ pp.297, 298, 340. In New Zealand literature iceberg imagery is most notably associated with Janet Frame, who uses it in *Faces in the Water* (1961) to signal the return of her instability at times. Edmond's use of the same image is more positive because it marks her move towards individuation as an artist.

been a highly fictionalised construct, as Hood shows us that Ashton-Warner's was, and King shows us that Sargeson's was. In 'Only Connect: The Making of an Autobiography', Edmond is quite clear about her reasons for writing autobiography. She wanted to find a structure for her life, to go back and discover how she came to be a poet at a later age in life. It is a quest for self-knowledge, brought about by the curiosity of the women whom she meets at public readings, who also want to know how it occurred.

The question of who I was - which really meant where I had been before, since clearly I had lived some other life before this fairly visible one - came up constantly, in talks after readings and at other times. Women who cherished unsatisfied ambitions to 'do their own thing' were particularly curious about the facts of my life. I could never find an answer

From the flippant 'Oh I wasn't anywhere', which even as I said it induced in me an uncomfortable sense of betrayal, I moved a long way in my own thinking, though not in my power to explain what 'anywhere' (or the 'nowhere' it implied) might be; *still less how the transition had occurred, which was of course what they really wanted to know.*

Life Number One, as I began to call it, the years I had spent living in country towns and bringing up my family, had been vital, authoritative and comprehensive. I strongly (though privately) resisted the assumption, which I could see many people made, that Life Number One had merely been a matter of waiting around for Life Number Two to take over.

This was the time when the Women's Movement in New Zealand was maturing, becoming more historically aware. ... *I seemed to be giving the reasons for my life to fall into two distinct and separate phases, but not how it actually happened.* (247-48; my emphases)

Edmond is admitting that she did not know how the transition between 'Life Number One' and 'Life Number Two' occurred. Her story of her life thus becomes a journey to discover how she came to her present identity of poet. Tellingly, she does not start at the beginning of her life, but the *middle*.

I had begun with the search for a pattern of cause and effect in the events of my life, the choices I had made Beginning in the middle, where it seemed at first that my story lay ... I looked more closely at the reasons I had arrived at just that point at that time. Everything connected. (249)

Edmond has 'two' lives, just as in traditional spiritual autobiography there are 'two' lives (before and after conversion). These are connected by the epiphany, which marks the end of the first life, and the beginning of the second. To make her dual lives connect, Edmond draws on the structure of the spiritual autobiography, in which the bipartite narrative is structured around an epiphany. An epiphanic experience is the transition she needs to begin the move from Life Number One (domestic) to Life Number Two (literary). Like Sargeson and Ashton-Warner, Edmond uses the spiritual autobiographical narrative to give her life shape and meaning.

It is no coincidence that the title she chooses for her essay about her autobiography, 'Only Connect', is the epigraph to E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End*. Forster's imperative was directed at the necessity of humans making empathetic connections with one another in the face of the Other, but it also sums up one of the major themes of modernist writing, which is the problem of making connections - or meaning - in a secular world. For the modernist artist, this problem is solved through recourse to Art, and for the modernist literary autobiographer, Art becomes the ultimate sanction for their decision to become a writer, giving their life purpose and direction just as in the traditional spiritual autobiography this role, or power of ultimate sanction, was God's. Edmond's choice of Forster's phrase shows her to be quintessentially modernist in her autobiographical actions.

V. The artist vs. the wife.

The same year that volume 2 of Edmond's autobiography was published, another member of the Edmond family published an autobiography. Martin Edmond's *The Autobiography of My Father* (1992) is partly a lament for his father, Trevor Edmond, and

partly an attempt to tell 'the other side of the story'. In *An Autobiography*, Edmond mentions a family rift that erupts after she wins the Commonwealth Prize for poetry: the triumphant culmination of her individuated life is this institutional reinforcement of the merits of her poetry. The backlash causes Edmond to scrutinise her performance as a mother, as her daughter Rachael's suicide did earlier.

Part of the toll Edmond paid for seeking extension in her life, and breaking away from her fixed roles of mother and wife, was the breakdown of her relationship with at least one of her children. In *The Autobiography of My Father*, Martin Edmond shows himself to be strongly sympathetic to his father. In a part which is written as if addressed to his father, he writes:

Why you chose my mother you never quite said. You were so very different. Her character is convoluted and driven and interior. And you were by nature simple, upright and straightforward. You didn't have that commitment to what is called 'the inner life' that she has spent her time exploring. Rather, you expressed yourself directly, in action, in our involvement with the practicalities of life in small communities (28-29).

He also asks:

Why did you go on living together for nearly ten years when the marriage was so obviously over? Was that because she needed your economic support to continue to build her career? Or was she paying you back for the humiliation she felt she had suffered at your hands all through the fifties and the sixties, when you wore the smiling public face of success and she was stuck at home with six kids and all her frustrated ambitions? (158)

And later he comments, reverting to an archetypal image of a woman feeding cannibalistically off a man:

it still seems so very strange, the way your fall and her rise coincide exactly. As the power that had been yours flowed away from you, it seemed to feed directly into the

current of her life. As your strength, your self-confidence
and your optimism waned, hers increased. You could plot
it on a graph. (157-58)

It could be argued that part of Edmond's paralleling of her behaviour at different times in her life – her marriage at 21, her years spent as a mother and wife, and the eventual breakdown of her marriage – as typical of her gender and generation, is that showing her life to have been lived according to social ideologies of the time allows her to defend herself from the type of criticism that Martin Edmond's book displays. When her marriage is breaking up, she shows that other marriages are also breaking up: it is figured as a universal state.

Another way of defending her actions was to write a spiritual autobiography in which her decision to extend herself beyond the roles of mother and wife and become an artist, a poet, is sanctioned because of the tradition of the spiritual narrative. The social and spiritual narratives co-exist; the latter gives weight to Edmond's decision to become a poet. Edmond does not starve in a garret, like Ashton-Warner, or undergo physical hardship on the way to becoming an artist, but she does undergo spiritual hardship: the sense of frustration and unfulfilment that she gets from the years spent as a wife and mother. Even if she says that she lived 'richly' in those years, one thing was lacking: the artistic side of her nature that was visible in her childhood and thus shown to be inherent in her nature has been repressed. The epiphany Edmond experiences on the cricket pitch, where she sees herself as nothing, as invisible aside from existing to look after her husband and children, shows her life to have no meaning, no direction, no substance. The apparent meaninglessness of the quotidian, her everyday mundane existence, is redeemed by Art. Moving from a domestic life to a literary life gives her life, in a modernist sense, the ultimate possible meaning.

Ashton-Warner's story remains more personal than social, but like Edmond, she draws on something larger to tell her own narrative. Throughout, her identity is fixed as that of 'the artist'. Lawrence Jones writes in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors*:

The perspective from which Ashton-Warner tells her story
is provincial, with the usual provincialism dualism between
a hostile society (with more emphasis on its rejection of

non-conformity, less on its sexual puritanism ...) and the alienated artist. (332)

In the face of this alienation, Art plays a crucial role. Her modernist conception of the role of Art in her life is summed up in a passage which records a friend's reluctance to model for a sculpture.

... Opal finds herself obliged to sit for me in the schoolroom after work which she hates doing, being tired as well as hungry, and she speaks words that upset me about her days being quite as full as mine and that other people besides me have a right to their lives, and I reply that art claims prior right before everything, before everyone, that it *is* everything, the speech of life (303; her emphasis)

Throughout *I Passed This Way*, Ashton-Warner acts and dresses like an artist – or how she believed an artist should act and dress. Hood writes that she ‘lived life in a grand and dramatic way’ (100), and notes that people often found her subject's behaviour to seem affected, or inauthentic. Hood quotes the report of writer Barbara Dent, who corresponded with Ashton-Warner for some time before they actually met. When they did, Dent was shocked by the poseur she found:

The thing that completely put me off — she came and took my shoes off and put her slippers on me, kneeling in front of me. I thought this was an utterly absurd and inauthentic gesture, a parody of Christ washing the feet of the disciples. Evadne [Ashton-Warner's brother] tactfully left the room — but the conversation was stilted. (122)

Ashton-Warner's response to Dent's reactions, which Hood records, is telling. ‘[T]hat the things I say and do should not be understood, and are therefore claimed to be insincere is treatment I am accustomed to’ (125).

The claim of the misunderstood artist is predictable, but it shows the extent to which Ashton-Warner was ‘accustomed’ to being seen as ‘insincere’ by educated, liberal, even artistic friends, and not just the inhabitants of the small provincial communities in which she primarily lived and taught. Indeed, the reader of the autobiography may at

times find themselves tempted to giggle along with the ‘philistines’ that offended Ashton-Warner at the dinner party where she announced that she was an artist. This passage, describing Ashton-Warner teaching a roomful of students at Vancouver in the 1970s, is typical of her grandiose self-positioning:

Filling up from corner to corner with crowding talk and colour and coffee mugs, with legs, beards and hands to the under-running obbligato of the piano [Ashton-Warner is playing] until silence finally comes of itself and the company has become an audience instead, so I make my way through them, stepping over limbs, touching shoulders and heads for balance to my low chair before them. I’m wearing, if you want to know, the fugi silk hand-done shepherd’s smock I’d composed and sewn in Waiomatatini; a garment which ensures you are right outside and beyond any passing fashion whatever, except that of an artist. A garment of experience with some seams frayed and an ink spot or two on it.

Directly before me at my feet is one of the girls in short white shorts, legs and hands demurely folded, black hair flowing and brown eyes lifted like the doe in a glade unblinking on my face. Every nuance of the soul of the young exposed in this stance: trust, faith, hope, joy and the radiance of a girl in love. Like a child I engage her in the brand-new greeting song I composed the words for last week from the melody of Schubert, and chance has arranged she is marvellously musical with an ear like my own, or better, following the tune as though she’d composed it herself. “And what is your name?” begins the song. [etc, 470]

The picture created of Ashton-Warner moving slowly through the crowd at her feet, occasionally touching their heads, is reminiscent of Dent’s account of the writer acting like Christ amongst ‘her’ disciples, like James K. Baxter taking on the role of the martyr in his Jerusalem years. And she is dressed for the part in her simple ‘shepherd’s’ smock, like Baxter with his beard, bare feet and ragged clothing.

Ashton-Warner did perceive herself as a martyr. One of the major themes of the autobiography is her underdog status. This pattern of persecution recurs from her early years at school. As a child, she studies an entire year’s work in one summer to enable her

to progress forward to the next standard, after having been put back. At high school, she shows herself to have been a 'pariah', hounded by various teachers and headmasters who have a grudge against her. Her struggle against authority figures in educational institutions continues into her teacher training, with her 'fall from the infant room ... [at] Wellington South' (164), and the marks of 95 percent and 99 percent she receives because it was unprecedented to give 100 percent. As a teacher she feels as if she is personally marked by the education department, and when her novels are published, she is at pains to show how she was acclaimed overseas while ignored by the literary and educational circles in New Zealand.¹⁴ The suggestion of persecution is made explicit in the preface: 'I can say I'm one who's been both rejected by and who has rejected my country' (vii).

This feeling of rejection is typical of the provincial artist, as well as the feeling that one is surrounded by 'philistines' who lack 'an enlightened philosophy' (134). The struggle Ashton-Warner faces on the way to becoming a writer is not as gendered as Edmond's, although she has the same problem of juggling different roles: wife, mother, teacher, artist. Her struggle is the struggle to exist at all in the face of philistine provincial society. Ashton-Warner exists by becoming the non-conformist, the artist, the misunderstood genius. It is her vs. society, or whatever form its repressive forces take, such as the education department. From a young age she adopts the role of artist not just because she has artistic leanings, but because she perceives herself to be different to others. Artistic inclination and a sense of isolation are one in the New Zealand provincial environment.

Lauris Edmond and Sylvia Ashton-Warner both write a spiritual autobiography which contains an epiphany. The major difference between their stories is that Edmond is more conventional, more reluctant to call herself an artist throughout, while Ashton-Warner holds to this identity-label even when she has other roles and occupations. Both

¹⁴ For example, comments such as: '*Incense to Idols* also was named by *Time* as one of the five best books for the year, and again failed to make the Godzone press' (356). She may have been largely ignored by the critical and academic community (see footnote 12 above, p.83-84), but Hood shows that writers and poets including Maurice Shadbolt, Louis Johnson, Bruce Mason, and Hone Tuwhare did attempt to meet Ashton-Warner. To these individuals, as to other fans to which she replied, Ashton-Warner presented herself as one who had been rejected by the literary community: 'the reaction ... to both *Spinster* and *Incense to Idols*, had been one of spite and misunderstanding' (165). In other words, she continued in her self-imposed role of persecuted or misunderstood artist.

tell 'one story' of struggle: Ashton-Warner against the philistines she encounters in provincial New Zealand society, Edmond against the social ideology of the time that says a woman's role is in the home. Both, however, emerge as the artist triumphant: Edmond as a prizewinning poet, and Ashton-Warner as an internationally acclaimed writer and educationalist. The autobiography of another female New Zealand writer, Janet Frame, shows another way one may fall outside of socially expected behaviour, as well as demonstrating a fourth way the 'one story' of the artist may be written.

CHAPTER 3:
Janet Frame:
The Angel and the Envoy.

I. Introduction.

Like Sargeson's and Edmond's, Janet Frame's autobiography comprises three volumes, published collectively as *An Autobiography* (1989). Like Sargeson's, Edmond's, and Ashton-Warner's, it is a spiritual autobiography. However, the device or feature that I have characterised, up until now, as the most obvious determining feature of the spiritual autobiography, the epiphany – which structurally divides the subject's life, in the case of Sargeson's and Edmond's, or confirms one's decision to become a writer, out of a number of artistic options, in the case of Ashton-Warner's – is missing from Frame's autobiography. There is no epiphany like the one that occurs to Sargeson in his uncle's orchard at the end of *Once is Enough*, or the one that Edmond experiences watching her family play cricket one summer holiday in Napier, or the sequence of events that comprise Ashton-Warner's epiphany, following her meeting with the pianist Lili Kraus. For Sargeson, the epiphany in the orchard confirms his decision to become a writer: it is the apex of one of the dominant themes of the autobiography, the power of the imagination. For Edmond, the moment is not so much a realisation or determination of identity, but a determination of a *lack* of identity, a moment where she realises she does not possess any self aside from her roles as wife and mother. This knowledge leads to the continuance of her tertiary education, and the shift of her poetry from the private into the public sphere. For Ashton-Warner, it is the moment where the path of writer is chosen from several possible options.

In Frame's autobiography there is no such obviously epiphanic moment, although she has shown herself to be capable of rendering such a moment in her fiction, especially in her early fiction which Lawrence Jones designates as belonging to the Provincial

period.¹ In her first novel *Owls Do Cry* (1957) the young Daphne Withers (who will grow up to be institutionalised) is looked after by a neighbour after her sister has been burnt to death at the rubbish dump. Daphne is given a seedcake but she does not eat it:

She looked quickly round the room as if to find someone else to give the seedcake to, but there was no one else there but Daphne, Toby and Chicks: so she put the cake in a dish, beside a packet of needles and a wad of darning wool, and the seedcake sprouted into a tall gold flower growing up through the roof and further than the sky, and Daphne saw it, and picked one of its petals to take home in the car. (33)

It is a typically modernist epiphany: an unexplained manifestation arises out of something ordinary. It occurs to a young, sensitive protagonist who is a figure of the artist as a child, and it is symbolic both of an ability to see special things amongst everyday reality (Daphne sees the 'seed' cake as well as the flower that may have sprouted from the seed), and a refusal to live in the world without one's sensibility being filtered through the medium of art, or the imagination.

If Frame could write a modernist novel in which her artistic self-as-protagonist could experience an epiphany, why, therefore, does her autobiography not contain one? I believe the answer to be linked to Frame's reasons for choosing to write autobiography; to her desire to 'set the facts straight', the same impulse relating to her approving Michael King as her biographer whereas previously she had gone to great lengths to remain out of the public eye. King attests in the Author's Note to *Wrestling with the Angel: The Life of Janet Frame* (2000) that Frame 'made no attempt to dissuade [him] from publishing any information that [his] research uncovered', yet as a live biographical subject, she must have been able to control what was and was not published, just as she did when she was autobiographer and autobiographical subject. She had an agenda in wanting her biography written, as she did when she was writing her autobiography. The protagonist of *Faces in the Water* (1961), Istina Mavet, is at times of doubtful sanity. The reader is never fully able to come to a decision as to whether or not the narrator, who describes her time in a number of mental institutions, is or has been 'mad'. Frame too, as her

¹ 'The Novel', *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, 155.

autobiography tells us, spent almost a decade of her life – most of the years of her twenties – in mental institutions, like Istina. However, at no time is the reader left to feel unsure as to the nature of the subject's sanity. Frame shows us that although she was institutionalised, she was never 'mad'. She portrays herself as having pretended to suffer from schizophrenia in order to survive: the role is adopted as protective guise or dress to offer her cover and protection. Yet it backfires, and she is committed.

The autobiography could therefore be described as a 'sanity project'. The whole impetus behind the writing of the autobiography seems to be to show once and for all that she was never mentally ill, that the original diagnosis of schizophrenia was erroneous, that subsequent commentators who have linked her writing to her presumed mental instability, as the following example shows, are also wrong:

The general opinion of the literary world ... is confirmed by the reference in *The New Zealand Encyclopaedia* to my 'tragic disordered power' and 'unstable personality', an opinion repeated many times by people unknown to me.
(277)

In the same paragraph she describes the diagnosis of schizophrenia as a 'an awful mistake', which instigated 'a continued misinterpretation of [her] plight.' Frame's autobiography aims to fix this 'awful mistake', to *write* the wrong, to alter medical, critical, and general public opinion of her 'madness'.

This idea of the autobiography as 'sanity project' is not new, but it affects my project thus. The epiphany is the foundational structural feature of spiritual autobiography, dividing the subject's life into before and after; whether it be before and after conversion, as in the original religious autobiography, the conversion narrative, or before and after determination of one's identity as an artist. How can Frame's autobiography be a spiritual autobiography if it does not contain an epiphany, and *why* does it not contain an epiphany?

Sargeson's epiphany, where he seems to experience or enter a previous summer afternoon in his uncle's orchard, while he remains physically in the temporal present, may be described as a vision, or a hallucination. Edmond's experience is slightly different: she sees herself from the viewpoint of her family members, her husband and

children, which may be described as an out-of-body experience. Ashton-Warner describes a conversation with God in the style of Gerald Manley Hopkins. Visions, hallucinations, out-of-body experiences, imaginary conversations with divinities: the first two in particular are often associated with schizophrenia, the illness which Frame portrays herself as having pretended to have suffered from, after being labelled as a schizophrenic while in Seacliff Hospital. In order to play this role she had to research the illness, and was familiar with its symptoms. In the second volume Frame describes her 'pretence at hallucinations and visions' which she manufactures for the benefit of John Forrest (Money), for whom she portrays herself to be pretending to be schizophrenic in order 'to win [his] attention' (201). The project of her autobiography is to show that she is not, and never was, schizophrenic. Thus, to describe her realisation of her identity as a writer coming as a 'vision' would be to display one of the major characteristics of schizophrenia.

Although at times Frame plays with schizophrenic imagery of fragmentation in her fiction and her autobiography (for example, cracks in the ice in *Faces in the Water*, crevices in time in *An Angel at My Table*)², and at one point sends the superintendent of Seacliff, Dr Blake Palmer, two poems 'where [she] deliberately chose imagery known to be 'schizophrenic' - glass, mirrors, reflections, the sense of being separated from the world by panels of glass' (241) - to structure her narrative around a vision would be anathema to her project.

Even though it lacks an epiphany, Frame's autobiography is still a spiritual autobiography for three primary reasons, two of which I will discuss in detail below.

² In *Faces in the Water* Istina justifies her institutionalisation thus: 'I was put in hospital because a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched, with their world, drifting away through a violet-coloured sea where hammer-head sharks in tropical ease swam side by side with seals and the polar bears. I was alone on the ice.' (10) Much later, when she is transferred to a 'chronic' dormitory, the same imagery is used to signify her isolation: 'And once again I heard the groaning and grinding of ice that surrounded me and I glimpsed the faces of people embedded in the ice and staring at me with a rigid bloodless glass. Icebergs in a hencoop you ask? Yes, and glaciers and hailstones and snow and a glistening border of snails and the sun cracking the wheat.' (229) Glass imagery is also used, known by Frame to be common to schizophrenics: 'the prospect of the world terrified me: a morass of despair violence death with a thin layer of glass spread upon the surface ... while the sun ... rose higher in the sky ... threatening every moment to melt the precarious highway of glass' (38). There is a 'Matron Glass' at 'Cliffhaven'. Fragmentation as motif is also used in *An Angel At My Table*, like the imagery prevalent in the third volume of Lauris Edmond's autobiography. 'I had somehow fallen into a crevice in time' (215) Frame says of her experience in Auckland. Frame's use of this imagery signals the return of her instability

First, the spiritual autobiographical narrative is based on the Christian cycle of sin and redemption from sin through acceptance of and devotion of oneself to God, or salvation ('salvation' is defined as both 'deliverance from sin and its consequences and admission to heaven, brought about by Christ' and 'a religious conversion').³ For Frame, writing is a salvation, as it *literally* saves her life. Her autobiography shows how close she came to having a leucotomy, which while not a fatal operation, would have removed her imaginative capacity and certainly ended her writing career. She writes:

I had seen in the ward office the list of those 'down for a leucotomy', with my name on the list, and other names being crossed off as the operation was performed. My 'turn' must have been very close when one evening the superintendent of the hospital, Dr Blake Palmer, made an unusual visit to the ward. (222)

Palmer, having read in that evening's paper that Frame had won the Hubert Church Award for *The Lagoon and other stories*, tells her: 'I've decided that you should stay as you are. I don't want you changed.' The drama and coincidence of the event is the stuff of fiction but the repercussions of Frame winning the award go beyond literary recognition. Frame spells it out explicitly in the text: 'It is little wonder that I value writing as a way of life when it actually saved my life ... I repeat that my writing saved me' (221-22). Later she describes her writing as a liferaft that she clings to, her only means of keeping her sense of identity after the trauma of living in mental institutions for extended periods.

Secondly, in her autobiography there is a crisis or obstacle to be overcome, as the obstacle faced in Sargeson's autobiography was puritanism, as the obstacle Edmond faced was her gender, as the obstacle Aston-Warner faced was being an artist in a philistine society. The obstacle that Frame must overcome is the obstacle of the (mis)diagnosis of schizophrenia, and this will be discussed below.

Finally, there is another aspect to Frame's autobiography, most prevalent in *The Envoy From Mirror City*, which aligns it with the spiritual autobiography. In this

at times, unlike Edmond's, which is more positive as at the same time she is 'fragmenting', she is moving towards individuation.

³ *The Concise English Dictionary*, 1066.

volume, imagination and spirituality take on a correlation for Frame, as they do in her 'mentor' Sargeson's autobiography. The title phrase refers to the prevailing journey metaphor that Frame uses to describe the writing or imaginative process. As author, she is led into another world, a 'mirror' of her own (the image comes from the reflected seaside city of Ibiza), a parallel world from which she gathers things to write about. Fiction, Frame is saying, is not simply a reflection of life – it is life transformed by the imagination. The other world or Mirror City can be threatening: Frame mentions artists who travel there but do not return. She is guided on these potentially perilous travels by her Envoy, who leads her there and back again.

This may be read as a spiritual process. Frame is guided – metaphorically – to another world, an other-worldly world, by an Envoy between the two. As with Sargeson, the imaginative process for Frame takes on the dimensions of a spiritual experience. She is guided to another world, a superior world *transformed* by the imagination, by one who can travel between these two worlds, the Envoy, like an angel travelling between heaven and earth. In *Wrestling with the Angel* Michael King reveals how Frame believed Rilke's poem from which she took her title 'An Angel at My Table' to be 'the story of [her] life' (456), and returns throughout to the place of angels in Frame's life: the last part of this chapter will discuss the implications of this belief.

II. The crisis of the misdiagnosis.

In the previous chapter I showed how the childhoods of Edmond and Ashton-Warner are figured as portraits of the female artist as a child. Equally, Frame could have been included in that discussion, for the first volume of her autobiography, *To the Is-land*, shows that she was determined to become a poet from her childhood. She becomes enraptured by words, poems and stories from an early age, and when she writes a poem at school for which she is commended, the parental approval this brings leads her to continue writing. Unlike Edmond, she never lets go of the childhood dream of being a poet. Although Frame's parents allow her to finish high school in order that she may go to Teachers' College, she remains privately determined to become a poet – studiously

working towards possession of the prerequisite ‘imagination’, studying the lives of poets. ‘Dear Mr Ardenue,’ she writes in her diary, ‘They think I’m going to be a schoolteacher, but I’m going to be a *poet*’ (132). Her identity in *To the Is-Land* is deliberately unformed, left inchoate (she points out later her deliberate use of ‘we’ to describe her shared childhood),⁴ and in *An Angel at My Table* she writes that ‘in order to survive [she] had to conceal [her] ‘I’, the resulting ‘I’ being left ‘shadowy ... almost a nothingness, like a no-woman’s land’ (161), yet dreams of being a poet still sustain her everyday life, providing a focus on which to pin her identity.

In *An Autobiography*, Frame shows how she came to be a patient in mental institutions, while at the same time emphasising her practical nature, how she lives ‘in the world’; her normality, her sanity. She rejects the diagnosis of schizophrenia, yet at the same time she shows us that she adopts the guise of a schizophrenic as it is easier for her to get help and attention in this role than any other. The misdiagnosis becomes the crisis which she must overcome. From her childhood she has associated personal disability with greatness, or creativity: how can she be a writer if she is not schizophrenic? Ashton-Warner adopts the dress of ‘the artist’, wearing a painter’s smock to signify her identity: to play the role of artist Frame chooses a more metaphoric dress which has more significant consequences.

In *To the Is-Land*, Frame emphasises her ordinariness, while at the same time showing how the foundations were laid for her entry into mental institutions. Frame’s later fiction especially is known for its complexity and teasing nature, and conjunct to her spinning of these two threads, the thread of her pragmatism, and the thread of how she came to be institutionalised, is another thread which invites the reader to see her life as a fairytale in which she will undergo, like the central character of many fairytales, suffering and hardship, and emerge triumphant and recognised, as Edmond and Ashton-Warner stand alone and successful in their different ways at the end of their autobiographies.⁵

Frame paints herself as practical, earthy even, *normal*. ‘I and my life, I felt, were excessively ordinary’ (132), she writes. She repeatedly emphasises the practical aspect of

⁴ In *An Angel At My Table* she writes: ‘My previous community had been my family. In *To the Is-land* I constantly use the first person plural – we, not I’ (194).

⁵ Sargeson is figured at the end with his friend ‘M’, who is shown to have become his partner after Harry’s death.

her nature, as the following quotations illustrate, because she sees it as a major drawback, impeding her development as a poet.

No one had ever called me imaginative or poetic, for I was a practical person, even writing poems which were practical, with most never failing to mention some new fact I had learned or giving lists of people, places, colours. (92)

How could I ever be a poet when I was practical, never absentminded, [and] I liked mathematics [?] (93)

My own poems ... lacked the vague otherworldliness which I admired in June's poems and which I equated with the elusive 'imagination'.... My life had been for many years in the power of words. It was driven now by a constant search and need for what was, after all, 'only a word' – imagination. (113)

According with her pragmatism, Frame wishes for an imagination that is not the dreamy, absentminded type of imagination associated with the figure of Shirley Grave, her 'poetic' classmate, but an imagination that allows her to remain 'in the world'.

... I remained uncomfortably present within the word [sic] of fact, more literal than imaginative. I wanted an imagination that would inhabit a world of fact, descend like a shining light upon the ordinary life of Eden Street, and not force me to exist in an 'elsewhere'. I wanted the light to shine upon the pigeons of Glen Street, the plum trees in our garden, the two japonica bushes (one red, one yellow), our pine plantations and gully, our summer house, our lives, and our home, the world of Oamaru, the kingdom by the sea. I refused to accept that if I were to fulfil my secret ambition to be a poet, I should spend my imaginative life among the nightingales instead of among the wax-eyes and the fantails. (101)

Yet while she is assuring the reader of her normality, Frame shows how the foundations came to be laid for her entry into mental institutions. Alongside her

internalisation of the belief that to be a poet one must possess a good imagination, Frame emphasises that she grows up with a connection between suffering and ability firmly drawn.

[I]n our home there was a continued association between disability and proven ability, as Mother repeatedly tried to console Bruddie [Frame's brother] with stories of Beethoven and his deafness, Milton and his blindness, Julius Caesar and his epilepsy, with the implication that surely Robert Frame ... had a life to look forward to in the hope of either a miraculous recovery ... or the development of a talent that could bring him fame and fortune. (78)

Just as Frame despairs of not possessing the necessary poetic imagination, she mentions being 'wretchedly conscious that [she] had none of the disability esteemed in poets: [she] had not even a parent dead' – her sister Myrtle's death and Bruddie's epilepsy do not 'qualify', being too 'present' – for by now she has internalised the belief that '[a]ll poets have had tragic lives' (93).

Frame also shows how she comes to adopt as her own, at a time of adolescent insecurity, the personality traits which eventually lead to her hospitalisation. She is at pains to show how rather than being qualities which she intrinsically possesses, they are attributes which are given or imposed by others. She portrays herself as adopting or wearing these attributes as she will later wear the garb of schizophrenia.

[T]he idea of 'difference' given to me by others in a time when I did not know myself and was hesistant in finding out, for *I was not an introspective person*, was reinforced by Miss Gibson's remark to Isabel, 'You Frame girls think you're so different from everybody else'. (109; my emphasis)

[I]n an adolescent homelessness of self, in a time where I did not quite know my direction, I entered eagerly a nest of difference which others found for me but which I lined with my own furnishings. (110)

One such ‘adopted’ trait which will turn out to be instrumental in Frame’s hospitalisation comes from this period: the ‘welcome, poetic attribute’ of shyness, ‘given’ separately by two of her teachers, is ‘seized’ and ‘made a part of [her] “personality”’ (116). This shyness leads to Frame’s inability to socialise at university and Teachers’ College, and subsequently with her fellow teachers (‘Too timid to go to morning and afternoon tea with a room full of other teachers, I made excuses about “having work to do in the classroom”, aware that I was going against all the instructions about the need to “mix in adult company ...”’), and contributes to her ‘fear’ of being ““inspected” by the headmaster or inspector’ (184): walking out on the inspector’s visit means the failure of her teaching career and leads to her suicide attempt, her mention of this in an essay given to John Forrest (Money), her subsequent admission to the psychiatric ward of Dunedin hospital, and her six weeks at Seacliff.

At the same time that Frame is asserting her normality and showing the reader of her autobiography how she came to be admitted to hospital (‘an awful mistake’), in *To the Is-Land* Frame also teasingly invites the reader to see her life as a fairytale. *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* first leads her to link ‘the world of living and the world of reading ... in a way [she] had not noticed before.’ She summarises the characters as ‘none of whom were more nor less than [she and her sisters] were’, and describes the traditional fairytale structure of ‘the many long years of wandering and searching, full of hope and expectation’ (43-44). Later she tells us that in her reading she ‘identified most easily with the stoical solitary heroine suffering in silence’ (127). And at the same that she denies that her work is in any way ‘great’, she sets up correlations with other writers’ lives: her mother saying, ‘How wonderful, kiddies, Charles Dickens, born in poverty, growing up to be a great writer’ (70); the closeness Frame and her siblings feel to the Brontës (95). Frame’s life, with her long-term incarceration in mental hospitals and repeated ECT treatment, her miraculous escape from being leucotomised, and her subsequent international recognition as a writer, shares the structural terms of a fairytale narrative, with its suffering and horror followed by fame (albeit unwelcome) and accolade. Although the fairytale narrative elevates the subject as ‘special’, which Frame is at pains to elude, its relationship to her own story illustrates one of the recurring themes of the autobiography: the relationship of literature to life.

In *An Angel at My Table* Frame is diagnosed as schizophrenic, yet as before she emphasises her pragmatism, her normality, her sanity throughout this volume. Most often she does this by contrasting herself diametrically with her mother, who while not mentally ill has a habit of being absorbed in a dream world. This irritates Frame:

I felt that my mother lived in a world which in no way corresponded with the 'real' world, and it seemed that her every word was a concealment, a lie, a desperate refusal to acknowledge 'reality'. (161)

The strong feeling haunted me that Mother had never lived in her 'real' place, that her real world had been her life within. (226)

Our excessive solicitude [of the children towards their mother] gave way at times to exasperation at her 'other-worldliness' ... It was she who was happy merely to dream of it [going down on the flat]; I wanted its reality. (241)

By describing her irritation with her mother's tendency to dream Frame is of course disassociating herself from this kind of behaviour. Again, she is reiterating her normality, how she lives and belongs in the world. Towards the end of the volume, when she is staying with Sargeson and writing the story that will become *Owls Do Cry*, she writes of the character Daphne:

Daphne resembled me in many ways except in her frailty and absorption in fantasy to the exclusion of 'reality'; I have always been strong and practical, even commonplace in my everyday life. (251)

So when Frame dismisses the medical diagnosis of schizophrenia, it is unsurprising that this aspect of her personality is referred to yet again.

I knew that I was shy, inclined to be fearful, and even more so after my six weeks of being in hospital and seeing what I had seen around me, that I was absorbed in the world of imagination, but *I also knew that I was totally present in*

the 'real' world and whatever shadow lay over me, lay only in the writing of the medical certificate [196; my emphasis].

Despite her denunciation of the the diagnosis, Frame shows us that she plays the role of a textbook schizophrenic in order to keep the attention of John Forrest, and as a means of receiving help when she is unable to cope with problems of everyday living, such as getting her teeth extracted. Her predicament is illustrated in the title of Part 1 of *An Angel*, 'Tricks of Desperation'. Roleplaying as a schizophrenic offers her a way to live. 'If necessary I could use my schizophrenia to survive' (212), she tells us.

I was taking my new status seriously. If the world of the mad were the world where I now officially belonged ... then I would use it to survive, I would excel in it. I sensed that it did not exclude my being a poet. (198)

It is sanctioned because of the association instilled by her mother of artistry with disability, shown to us in *To the Is-Land*, and repeated at the beginning of *An Angel at My Table*, when Frame thinks forebodingly of how 'living in the city [of Dunedin] might destroy [her]' and quotes the Wordsworth lines '*We poets in our youth begin in gladness; / But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness*' (151).

Masquerading as a schizophrenic (later she refers to her 'schizophrenic fancy dress' [203]) offers her a way to live, but it backfires when Frame is readmitted to hospital. Part 2 of *An Angel at My Table*, 'Finding the Silk', describes Frame's attempts to make a life for herself away from the institutionalisation that marked the years of her twenties. Throughout this traumatic period she still clung to the idea of becoming a writer – '[a]ll I had left was my desire to be a writer' she says bluntly at one point, even though her ambition was 'thought to be suspect, perhaps a delusion' (213), a symptom of the illness that she so denies suffering from. The phrase 'finding the silk' is a metaphor for the discovery of her identity, with its connotations of escape and salvation.⁶ Even though Frame believes that she does not 'have a 'place' in the world'

⁶ The thread, classically associated with Jason using it to find his way out of the Minotaur's maze, is a recurring image in the autobiography, with its contrasting threatening associations of masking and suffocating, winding around the subject, like the wool imagery in *Owls Do Cry*.

(231), her identity is still fixed on her writing. When poems and stories offered to *Landfall* are rejected by editor Charles Brasch, the place of writing in her life and her identity make-up is made clear when she says: 'What could I do if I couldn't write? Writing was to be my rescue. I felt as if my hands had been uncurled from their clinging place on the rim of the lifeboat' (239).

An Angel at My Table ends with Frame preparing to go overseas. This requires her to be examined in order to see whether she is 'fit' to travel. Frame writes:

This was to be the beginning ... of a number of investigations of my sanity by people who would try to find out for themselves whether I was incurably ill as the medical diagnosis would imply, or whether (as was later proved during my time in London) there had been an awful mistake even in my first admission to hospital, and from then a continued misinterpretation of my plight. (277)

The final volume of her autobiography will show that not only the diagnosis of schizophrenia, but Frame's entire hospitalisation, was 'an awful mistake'. And as with Sargeson's overseas travels, Frame finds that the physical journey goes hand in hand with a search for identity.

In *The Envoy From Mirror City*, Frame shows herself to play a much more active role in the living of her daily life, and the planning of her future. Whereas before she was prone to lapse into 'the submissive, passive role which in hospital had been forced upon [her]', and gives the subject 'no ownership of one's self' (282), now she is determinedly retaining her 'I', steering clear of people like Patrick Reilly who threaten her independence. She still roleplays as a schizophrenic for Forrest's (Money's) benefit ('In answering his occasional letters I delivered with a casual touch, myself in my former role of supposed 'cleverness', 'difference', a dreamer of dreams, maker of fantasies'), even though she can confidently say: 'I knew I had not suffered from it [schizophrenia]' (339).

In Part 2 of *The Envoy* she returns to London where she 'planned ... to discover by objective means whether [she] had ever suffered from schizophrenia' (367), because although she was convinced she never had, there does remain some doubt: just as

schizophrenia usually involves seeing visions and hallucinations, it also involves a refusal to acknowledge reality that Frame so condemned in her mother.

I had to know whether my own views, usually met with polite disbelief or sometimes with sceptical agreement, held any truth or were merely another instance of self-deception.
(371)

After extensive, sophisticated testing at the Maudsley Institute, the doctors' views concur with Frame's.

... Sir Aubrey gave the verdict. I had never suffered from schizophrenia, he said. I should never have been admitted to a mental hospital. Any problems I now experienced were mostly a direct result of my stay in hospital.

I smiled. 'Thank you,' I said shyly, formally, as if I had won a prize.

... I ... had suddenly been stripped of a garment I had worn for twelve or thirteen years — my schizophrenia. I remembered ... how, at first disbelievingly, then surrendering to the opinion of the 'experts', I had accepted it, how in the midst of the agony and terror of the acceptance I found the unexpected warmth, comfort, protection: how I longed to be rid of the opinion but was unwilling to part with it. And even when I did not wear it openly I always had it by for emergency, to put on quickly, for shelter from the cruel world. And now it was gone, not destroyed by me and my constant pleading for 'the truth' allied to an unwillingness to lose so useful a protection, but banished officially by experts: I could never again turn to it for help.

The loss was great. ... I was bereaved. I was ashamed. ... How could I explain myself when I could no longer move cunningly but necessarily from the status of a writer to one of having schizophrenia, back and forth when the occasion *suit*ed? (375)

Frame's three-volume autobiography ends on her return to New Zealand, shortly after (50-odd pages in the text) the revelation that she never had schizophrenia, in 1963. Yet *To the Is-Land* was published in 1984, which means that Frame deliberately chose to end her autobiography at a point nearly 20 years in the past. This shows that in writing

the story of her life, the most important story she felt she had to tell was the story of the misdiagnosis, and how it affected her life – in order to dispel continued critical and public speculation about her mental condition, to set the facts straight. The structure of her autobiography therefore is the structure of her relationship with ‘*shizzophreenier*’ (196), from her childhood where she emphasises how reading about the lives of poets and her mother’s connection between disability and the great artists leaves her convinced that in order to be a poet she needs to have something wrong with her; how she adopts attributes that accord with her conception of a poetic sensibility; how she fails to cope with teaching and walks out, is taken into hospital for observation, and is misdiagnosed as schizophrenic. Yet the role of schizophrenic is adopted due to her belief that ‘it did not exclude [her] being a poet’ (198), because of the connection established in childhood between illness and greatness. It is a dangerous role to play, and results in long-term institutionalisation. Once Frame is out of hospital, where she continues her career as a writer and embarks overseas, all that remains is to have the diagnosis proven wrong by an internationally recognised institution. She returns to New Zealand, thus completing the geographical journey, but the autobiographical journey to show that she was not schizophrenic has already been discharged. All that remains is for Frame to tidy up the story of her life using the devices of fiction: the last chapter is entitled ‘The Return’, while she has moved from one who perceived in childhood the closeness of literature to life, to one who is literally in the literary realm: she is ‘the Traveller returning’ (423).

The sense of bereavement Frame feels when she is removed of her schizophrenic garment is related to her lack of confidence in her identity as a writer. Once the protective layer is gone, she is left exposed, insecure, but it finally cements her identity as that of writer. In a sense, this insecurity about her identity may be linked to the crises that the other autobiographers in this discussion face. Sargeson had glimpses of what he wanted to do, what he wanted to achieve, but it is only after the epiphany in the orchard that he is confident of his identity as a writer. Edmond’s experience is shown to be roughly similar: frustrated with the limited nature of her life, she finds that it takes a moment of epiphany to reveal the extent of her limitations and lead her to actively pursue other roles, resulting in her late career as a poet. Ashton-Warner is the one figure in this discussion who never seems to be uncertain about her identity as an artist. Yet it takes a

breakdown and a therapist's intervention for the role of writer to be foregrounded as her 'true' identity from several possible options.

As if to celebrate her new identity, Frame changed her name to Janet Clutha,⁷ just as Norris Davey became Frank Sargeson when he emerged as a writer from his uncle's farm. In *Barbed Wire and Mirrors* Lawrence Jones tells us that '[h]er changing of her name, as with Sargeson, symbolised her assumption of her genuine identity in the face of the disapproval of a provincial society' (337). He believes she decides to end the autobiography where she does, on her return to New Zealand, because '[t]he story of the making of the provincial artist is finished' (338).

Frame does not undergo an obvious moment of epiphany like her protagonist Daphne Withers's vision of a tall gold flower growing out of a seedcake. But the crisis of the misdiagnosis that she addresses in her autobiography is in a sense a spiritual crisis because once the doctor's error is finally dispelled, and the layer of the supposed illness peeled away, she is reborn as an artist without need of her protective shell.

III. Wrestling with the Angel.

Wrestling with the Angel takes as its title an episode from Genesis 32, which King quotes as his epigraph.

So Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled an angel with him until daybreak, who, when he saw he was not throwing him, struck his hip socket so that Jacob's thigh was dislocated . . . The angel said, 'Let me go for the day is breaking.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go until you bless me' . . . The angel said, 'Your name will be Jacob no longer, but Israel, because you have striven with God and with men and have won' . . . And the angel blessed him there. Jacob named that place Peniel, for 'I saw God face to face yet my life was preserved . . .' [King's ellipses]

⁷ *Wrestling with the Angel*, 191.

The title *Wrestling with the Angel* could refer to the biographical process - King 'wrestling' with his (live) subject, Frame. It could also refer to the imaginative process of writing fiction: Frame's life spent 'wrestling' with the imagination. King quotes Sargeson writing of Frame:

How like Bunyan and *Pilgrim's Progress* it all is . . .
Bunyan could feel himself backed by the Christian tradition, so was not entirely alone in his wrestling with Apollyon and what have you. But poor Janet stands for the solitary modern soul depending entirely upon personal resources when confronted by chaos.⁸

Sargeson may pin Frame down as modern, or correspondingly, 'secular', because her writing does not have a Christian tradition behind it, but King's choice of a biblical episode for his title hints at a modern soul who does draw on tradition – albeit literary tradition, rather than religious. The title of Frame's second volume of autobiography is *An Angel at My Table*: she acknowledges her literary debt to the poet Rilke in the same way that King acknowledges his literary debt to Sargeson for his choice of title: *Wrestling with the Angel* is a volume of Sargeson's plays.⁹ Yet the relationship between angels and the imaginative process is further drawn in *The Envoy to Mirror City* when the Envoy seems in many ways to be an epiphanic visitation or manifestation. Frame may not describe an epiphanic moment in the same manner as Sargeson, Edmond, or Ashton-Warner, yet her prevailing use of the Envoy to Mirror City as a metaphor of the writing process takes on epiphanic connotations.

Following his choice of title, King weaves a religious theme throughout the biography. The first paragraph begins thus:

'The people are Scotch,' Mark Twain said of Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1895. 'They stopped here on their way to heaven — thinking they had arrived.' Twain's theology might have been suspect but his powers of observation were acute. Dunedin was celestially beautiful (11).

⁸ *Frank Sargeson: A Life*, 332.

⁹ *Wrestling with the Angel: Two Plays: A Time for Sowing and The Cradle & the Egg* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1964). In the Acknowledgements to his own book by that name King tells us that the borrowing was deliberate: 'Frank Sargeson provided the book's title' (521).

King mentions early on Lottie Godfrey's (Frame's mother) family's Christadelphianism, and in particular her 'strong [belief] in the proximity of angels', and the 'strenuous efforts [she would make] to communicate this belief to her children' (15). King quotes two passages from *To the Is-Land* which illustrate how Frame comes to internalise this in her childhood, as she did her mother's belief in the relationship between greatness and disability.

[A] poor man might come to the door and be refused food or even have the dogs 'sooled' on to him, and lo! he would turn out to be an angel in disguise or even Christ himself. Mother warned us to be careful and not to laugh at people who we thought were strange or 'funny' because they, too, might be angels in disguise. (21)

Gypsies, beggars, robbers, swaggers, slaves, thieves, all the outcast victims of misfortune who yet might be angels in disguise, had become part of my dreams and comprehension of the Outside World. (29)

The idea that Frame grew up influenced by her mother to believe in the presence of angels on earth becomes a concept to which King returns throughout. He quotes from a diary entry written in Frame's last year of high school: 'In future I shall be only physically present in this world – mentally & spiritually in other worlds . . . I wish I could see an angel' (47). Later, during Frame's stay in Avondale hospital in Auckland, he describes a moment where she

came as close as she would ever come to losing belief in her identity and hope that she had any kind of future. She rolled on her straw mattress to face the darkened wall and recited the Twenty-third Psalm ... The following morning, as if in answer to a plea, Frame was moved back to Ward Seven, which she would always remember as 'an oasis with its park and willow tree and its friendly ward sister'. She took this to be a sign that prayers *were* heard, and that somebody, something — one of her mother's angels? — was looking after her. She retained this conviction, and this memory, for the rest of her life. (106)

This incident is one of many in the autobiography of which, as Patrick Evans has observed,¹⁰ King does not indicate his source. The internal quotation is from *An Angel at My Table*,¹¹ but not the event. The description must therefore come from one of the many conversations with his subject which King undertook in the five years it took him to research and write the biography, and which Frame would not allow him to quote directly. Because this information is not attributed directly but mediated through King, it is unclear whether the notion that it was one of her mother's angels looking after Frame was something that Frame suggested to King, or the interpretation was King's alone. However, the idea that Frame had a 'conviction' that some kind of higher power was looking after her is important, although the biography tells us that she never joins any type of formal, institutionalised religion, despite dabbling at one point in Catholicism following her niece Pamela's confirmation.

If this episode had been included in her autobiography, rather than her biography – along the lines of, 'I said my prayers and then I was rescued' – it would immediately align *An Autobiography* with the spiritual autobiography, because of the implications of the statement: that Frame was saved by direct divine intervention. But Frame does not include it, leaving it to King to record it. Why did she not include it, and why does King? Perhaps the answer is due to her surroundings: a mental institution in Auckland. If Frame had not been writing to dispel a legacy of mental illness, following her misdiagnosis as schizophrenic, there would have been no need to exclude such an obviously significant moment in her life. If she was not writing to show that there had been 'an awful mistake' (and hence extremely careful about what she did and did not include), the incident may have been described. That she mentioned it to King shows its significance: that King mentioned it in the biography shows its significance, especially when it is remembered that in choosing a title which refers directly to a biblical episode, King is setting up from the start a religious context in which to view Frame's story, a theme to which he returns again and again, as she returns to the idea of the Angel in her autobiography.

¹⁰ Department of English conference paper, University of Canterbury, 17/10/00.

¹¹ *An Autobiography*, 216.

Further on King quotes from what Frame describes a ‘statement of place’, written while she was staying in Sargeson’s army hut, where she writes: ‘in conversation I am bedevilled; in written expression an angel will visit’ (136). In this piece Frame worries about ‘the truth of [her] [being] discovered [to be] a mad woman with a thrush in the topmost twig of her head’, contrasted against the ‘royalty’ of Sargeson and his friends. The thrush is banished by ‘her’ angel.

[a]s soon as I walk out of the door I see the thrush lying dead at my feet, stoned by my angel. My angel waits on me when I am alone, writes for me, and tells me in my weeping, Don’t go to the palace any more where the thrushes fly and sing and you sit in tattered clothes and are alone because of what the thrushes say . . .

... [m]y angel has dashed out the milk-white brain of every thrush in the world, as soon as I leave the doorstep of the palace . . .

So, as my angel advises me, I intend to leave the hut of my banishing and the glittering towers of the castle, and go to the city, away from all the royalty where I do not belong because of my thrush

All this my angel tells me. Next week I shall do as my angel bids. (137)

Frame is speaking figuratively, yet why does she choose an angel to metaphorically represent the *source* of her written expression (‘My angel ... writes for me’)? Does she really believe, as her mother did, in the presence of angels on earth, or is ‘her’ angel simply another instance of her choosing to write in fable or metaphor as she so often does in her fiction, using analogy to illuminate the situation rather than describing it directly? Several times in *Wrestling with the Angel* Frame is quoted as referring to a guardian angel watching over her, writing to Sargeson: ‘my angel has provided all, including very cold weather ideal for writing; my angel is now forgiven the dreadful days at sea’ (149). To another letter King tells us that she ‘add[s] that her guardian angel had been especially attentive to her in New Hampshire’ (346). While staying at a friend’s house in England a thief falls into her back garden after being chased by police across roofs, and is carried through the house on a stretcher; to Frame, he seems ‘exactly the kind of person who could have been one of her mother’s “angels in disguise”’ (341).

Unlike the occasion where Frame recited the Twenty-third Psalm in hospital, a direct reference is given for this quotation ('Int.JF, 16/4/96').

Aside from her mother, the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke is the most obvious source for Frame's references to angels. A copy of his *Sonnets to Orpheus* had accompanied her to hospital since 1948.¹² The title of *An Angel at My Table* is a quotation from Rilke's *Les Vergers*,¹³ which Frame quotes in the original French after the dedication:

*Reste tranquille, si soudain
L'Ange à ta table se décide;
Efface doucement les quelques rides
Que fait la nappe sous ton pain.*

Rilke, 'Vergers'

King mentions Frame translating Rilke with Bill Brown (345), and her discovery of the passage that 'she was to make such telling use of in her autobiography fifteen years later, and which matched her mother's Christadelphian belief in the presence of angels ('Stay still, if the angel / at your table suddenly decides; / gently smooth those few wrinkles / in the cloth beneath your bread')' [349]. Yet another biographical detail is more revelatory. King writes that Frame said, 'subsequently, [Rilke's poem] represented 'the story of my life' (and, she might have added, the importance of angels in the cosmology she had inherited from her Christadelphian mother)' [456]. The bracketed information sees King again returning to Frame's mother's belief in angels, which he emphasises several times, but the importance of the phrase 'the story of my life' is shown in the way the quotation is referenced. Obviously, Frame said this to King: he wanted to quote it, recognising its significance; but being unable to quote her directly, quoted *himself* reporting this to someone else: 'MK to Roger Horrocks, 11/11/96, reporting a conversation with JF that had occurred that day' (560).

¹² *Wrestling with the Angel*, 98.

¹³ In Gina Mercer's article 'A Simple Everyday Glass' (*Journal of New Zealand Literature* 11, 1993) she points out that the poem is one of a cycle of 59 written late in Rilke's life, about the same year Frame was born. 'The cycle of poems is called *Vergers* (or *Orchards* in translation) and the one in question is No. 3' (46).

King's description of the night Frame believes her prayers were answered in Avondale hospital and took a conviction from this that someone was looking after her is telling of her belief in some kind of higher power. But due to the nature of her autobiographical project – that she was never schizophrenic – she shies away from mentioning such an episode because it leaves her open to accusations of delusions. By using Rilke, Frame circumvents this notion. Frame's project in writing her autobiography has been to emphasise her ordinariness, her pragmatic nature. She has taken pains to show how she is not special or great or greatly different to others, and hence to set herself up as a visionary would go against her purpose for writing. She cannot see the angel herself, but she can draw on somebody else's experiences, through Rilke's poems, to write about angels appearing while sanctioning her experience with literature. Rilke's angel may have been epiphanic: Frame cannot write about epiphany, but she can do the next best thing and make use of a writer who did. I have said before that there is no obvious epiphany in Frame's autobiography, as there is in Sargeson's, Edmond's, and Ashton-Warner's: there are, however, epiphanic experiences in her autobiography, even if they do come second-hand through Rilke.

Like Sargeson's reshaping of his life to leave out the Wellington events and court case, Frame uses Art to refashion the story of her life. Like Sargeson, she is of modernist sensibility and as he draws on the structure of the spiritual autobiography, characterised by the epiphany, to tell the story of his life, she also uses Art to control the story of her life, to make it seem more shapely, more ordered, more purposeful. She does not experience an epiphany first-hand, but she references a writer who wrote poetry about being visited by an angel and she returns to his poem throughout. In a sense this draws her even closer to the spiritual autobiographical tradition than Sargeson, because of the divine nature of the angel, whereas the origins of Sargeson's epiphany are more mysterious, for they are situated within the imagination. Yet by using Art directly – through Rilke – to shape her life, Frame is just as modernist in her autobiographical actions.

The prevailing metaphor that she uses to shape the third volume of her autobiography also has epiphanic connotations, as Frame's guardian angel (that she does not directly refer to in the autobiography, but is mentioned by King in the biography), is

‘the source of [her] written expression’, and in the autobiography the Envoy from Mirror City is directly figured as a source of her written expression. In this way the titles of her second and third volumes of autobiography – *An Angel at My Table* and *The Envoy from Mirror City* – may be seen to be directly related. The Angel has become the Envoy. Although the divine connotations have been removed, to be replaced with a metaphor for the imaginative process, a relationship between the two figures is still clear. In this way Frame’s conception of the creative process is as modernist as Sargeson’s, or even Joyce’s.

In volume 3 Frame stays in Ibiza, and a photograph in King’s biography of the city reflected in the water clearly shows the source of her metaphor. The ‘Mirror City’, the upside-down image of the real city in the water, is analogous to the world of the imagination. It is a parallel world, the world of literature and art, complete and self-contained as finished works of art are. Thus Frame in London is afraid of the Victorian nature of the architecture and atmosphere, with its connotations of repression and even imprisonment, yet through the Mirror City, although this term has not yet been used by her, she is able to control her fear: ‘the contemplation of the parallel, the mirror dream, sustained me, proofed me against the nightmare of the past’ (301). Travelling to Ibiza she sees the ‘mirror city that [she] looked upon each day’ (329), and after this the metaphor really takes hold, notwithstanding the association of mirror imagery with schizophrenia, of which Frame was very much aware:¹⁴

As I sat at my table typing, I looked each day at the city mirrored in the sea, and one day I walked around the harbour road to the opposite shore where the *real* city lay that I knew only as the city in the sea, but I felt as if I were trying to walk behind a mirror, and I knew that whatever the outward phenomenon of light, city, and sea, the real mirror city lay within as the city of the imagination. (336)

In the afternoons and evenings I’d tell the children stories using both the French and Spanish versions of ‘Once upon a time’ ... phrases that always transport me to

¹⁴ See p.93 above; her comment in *An Autobiography* that she sent the superintendent of Seacliff ‘two poems, ‘The Kite’ and ‘Within the Glass Mountain’, where [she] deliberately chose imagery known to be ‘schizophrenic — glass, mirrors, reflections, the sense of being separated from the world by panels of glass — in the hope that he would get [her] message.’ (241)

the mirror world like the Mirror City where civilisations live their lives under the light of the imagination instead of the sun. Lured always by that world ... I realised increasingly the extent of its treasure, discovered during visits to the Mirror City where the great artists had lived and returned to describe what they had seen and felt and known. I knew that some had visited and never returned. (357)

The journey is shown to be perilous, perhaps because it is too tempting to remain in the world of the imagination rather than to return to reality. It is a 'hazardous journey to the Mirror City' (405). Again, the simplified correlation that Frame inherited from her mother, that illness is often linked with the production of great art, appears, as the allure of Mirror City becomes a metaphor for living exclusively in the world of one's own imagination, or refusing to face reality. '[T]hough some might be lost there and never return there were always those who struggled home to create their works of art' (408).

And one does not always travel alone. Frame speaks of 'the journeys to and from Mirror City, either by the Envoy who is forever present, or by [her]self' (384); 'the constant journeys either of oneself or of the Envoy from Mirror City' (391-92). The definite article and the capitalisation emphasise the significance of the Envoy, who is an integral part of the process.

Frame's Mirror City is metaphoric, yet the metaphor she chooses invites a spiritual dimension to be placed upon the imaginative process, as Sargeson's Creation/literary creation parallel sets up this kind of relationship in his autobiography. The Angel of the second volume becomes the Envoy of the third. The Envoy travels back and forth between the 'real' world and another, more special, 'otherworldly' world, the world of the imagination; this is analogous to an angel travelling back and forth between heaven and earth. And like a guardian angel, the Envoy is always with her as guide and companion ('even as I write now the Envoy from Mirror City waits at my door, and watches hungrily' [434]), always present at her side. The last words of the autobiography depict an image of the Envoy continually ready to accompany her: 'And the Envoy waits' (435). In this sense, although the Envoy is a metaphorical figure, an imaginary companion on the journey to a land of the imagination, it (the Envoy is always referred to by that title, and never given a gendered pronoun) is an epiphanic visitation.

The Mirror City is also a kind of heaven for Frame in that it offers salvation. Even its contemplation brings comfort and relieves stress, as if it is a religious entity. '[T]he contemplation of the parallel, the mirror dream,' she tells us, 'sustained me, proofed me against the nightmare of the past' (301). Another way it offers salvation is that it is a place for those who fall outside of traditional gender roles. When Frame miscarries she writes:

I knew a feeling that was stronger than regret but not as intense as a bereavement, a no-woman's land of feeling where a marvellous sense of freedom sprang up beside hate for myself ... with the sense of freedom and the prospect of living a new life in Mirror City triumphing like the rankest, strongest, most pungent weeds that yet carry exquisite flowers, outgrowing the accepted flowers in no-woman's land. (358-59)

It may seem ironic that Frame should choose a 'mirror' metaphor to describe the world of the imagination when she has known, as she has told us earlier, that mirror imagery is common to schizophrenics. Yet Frame's choice of such an obvious metaphor shows that she is confident that she has solved the crisis of the misdiagnosis, that she has 'proven her sanity' to the reader. She teases to the end, in the same way that the picture on the cover of the Random House edition of the autobiography shows a mirrored or 'split' Frame; the photograph the picture is based on is the same one that she had taken to reassert her normality, her place in the world, after coming out of hospital.

In *The Double Vision* Northrop Frye briefly discusses the 'wrestling with the angel' episode, reminding us of an important factor in the biblical story which King elides in his epigraph. Jacob asks his opponent what his name is but is not answered, for 'he would acquire too much power over his opponent if he knew his name' (79). The power of naming, first undertaken by God in the Creation, is universally recognised. Frame not only names but renames the opponent with whom she wrestles in the imaginative process – the Envoy. *An Autobiography* is a story of empowerment, but not in the gendered, feminist sense of the word that Lauris Edmond's story is a story of empowerment, for example. *An Autobiography* sees Frame take charge and rewrite the

story of her life, reclaiming it from public and medical myths of mental illness. She shows how she conquers the crisis of the misdiagnosis in her own life, and is finally able to stand on her own as a writer without the support of an illness. In this the autobiography has a spiritual progression, from crisis to resolution. The belief in a guardian angel that King's biography shows Frame to possess only accentuates the spiritual dimensions of the autobiography which her constant reference to the Envoy and the Mirror City invite.

CONCLUSION

Frank Sargeson in *Sargeson* (1981), Sylvia Ashton-Warner in *I Passed This Way* (1979), Lauris Edmond in *An Autobiography* (1994), and Janet Frame in *An Autobiography* (1989) all tell the same story. Four writers, four autobiographies, and one story, which is the story of the creation of the artist in the Provincial period in New Zealand literature. I want to return to Lawrence Jones' statement in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors*:

For the writer of New Zealand literary autobiography 'There is one story only', although it may be expressed in various forms. ... The story, then, is that of the struggle of [the] artist to find a 'place' ... in a hostile provincial environment, a story of defeat and persecution but also of victory in the achievement of art (even if the art succeeds only in holding up a mirror in which the society could see its unlovely self if it only chose to look). (313)

The 'one story' of the New Zealand literary autobiography traces the artist's struggle, and ends with the artist, or Art, triumphant. The primary reason why New Zealand literary autobiography is related to spiritual autobiography is because the main determining feature of the spiritual autobiography is the protagonist's overcoming of a crisis or obstacle, and obstacles are unavoidable for the artist in the New Zealand Provincial environment. Other writers of other nationalities have written literary autobiography which is also spiritual autobiography - the most prominent being James Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* - but as this thesis has shown, it seems to be impossible for the New Zealand autobiographer to tell a story of their life that is not a story of struggle against primarily social obstacles, relating to the environment in which they live.

My aims in this thesis were to show how the above four autobiographies are spiritual autobiographies, and then to examine the reasons why each writer writes spiritual

autobiography, to determine whether it is due to the nature of their social environment, or to more personal reasons, based on the individual circumstances of their lives.

Frank Sargeson tells us in *Sargeson* that Joyce was one of his influences, and more than any of the other writers in this discussion, his autobiography most closely resembles *A Portrait* as volume 1 ends with an epiphany in an orchard, which is shown to be the determining moment for his subsequent devotion to writing. Other factors make it a spiritual autobiography: Sargeson invites the reader to compare his protagonist to Christian in Bunyan's allegorical spiritual autobiography *Pilgrim's Progress*, but his autobiographical journey is a modernist quest for meaning undertaken through the medium of language, and the spiritual crisis he experiences centres on the puritanism of New Zealand society which he simultaneously exposes and upholds in his fiction. Thus, his journey is also away from the restricting influences of his environment. Like Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*, to become an artist he must overcome the societal values he has internalised, particularly the puritan work-ethic.

However, Sargeson also had more individual reasons for using the narrative form of spiritual autobiography. As King's biography of Sargeson shows, Sargeson uses the epiphany to replace the courtcase as the determining crisis of his life. Reading the autobiography through the lens of the biography shows how Sargeson has reshaped and fictionalised events to fit the pattern of spiritual growth that he desires the reader to see. He takes advantage of the spiritual autobiographical narrative to rewrite the facts of his life so we do not get Sargeson 'as he was', but as he 'may worthily have been'. In a very modernist way, Sargeson uses Art to reshape his life for the better.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner's autobiography *I Passed This Way* is also a story of struggle. However, her struggle is not so much against the puritanism of New Zealand society (although at only five years older than Sargeson she is of the same generation), as much as against its philistinism. Ashton-Warner paints herself as an artist in an anti-aesthetic society. She is confident of her identity as 'the artist' and does not need an epiphany to confirm it, yet she still writes one, in which the identity of writer is confirmed above other artistic identities (painter or musician). Her epiphany is as much a fictional construct as Sargeson's, drawn from the spiritual autobiographical tradition. The difference is that whereas Sargeson's is closer to Joyce's narrative, Ashton-Warner

reaches back further to the religious origins of the spiritual autobiography, making a conversation with God part of her more extended epiphany. Yet this literary borrowing - the passage follows Gerald Manley Hopkins - is also a mark of a modernist writer. Like Sargeson, Edmond draws on her literary heritage to tell the story of her life, using the spiritual autobiographical narrative to elevate her status, to make her seem more 'special'.

Her struggle is a result of social conditions: it is also due to more personal, individual factors. A theme of persecution recurs throughout her autobiography. By using the spiritual autobiographical narrative, which is the narrative of an outsider struggling against hostile society, Ashton-Warner makes her struggle seem larger than it may actually have been. Hood's biography shows much of Ashton-Warner's perceived persecution to have been a product of her determination to remain apart and superior, to play the role of 'misunderstood artist'.

If it was difficult for men to be accepted as artists in the Provincial period, it was doubly difficult for women, yet Ashton-Warner's struggle is not so explicitly related to her gender as is the case for Lauris Edmond in her autobiography, *An Autobiography*. Growing up female in New Zealand society in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s was to grow up in a climate of very fixed social expectations towards the occupations of men and women; in this the autobiographies of Ashton-Warner, Edmond, Ruth Dallas, and Janet Frame concur. There are few roles open to Edmond, and it is only when she 'discards' the expected role of mother/wife that she is able to begin her writing career. Her main obstacle in her journey to becoming an artist is her gender. As Ashton-Warner struggled against the philistinism of New Zealand society, and Sargeson against its puritanism, the main aspect of Edmond's struggle is against the conventional mindset she has inherited with regard to the fixed roles of men and women in New Zealand society. Like Sargeson, Edmond uses the bipartite form of spiritual autobiography - structured around a life-changing epiphany - to represent what she describes as her 'divided' life. However, she also sees her story as representative of other women's - her post-epiphanic awareness of her lack of individuation is paralleled with the rise of feminism world-wide - and her life and experiences become symbolic of a generation's; her personal narrative represents a larger social narrative.

She also writes a spiritual autobiography for more individual reasons. One of her motives for beginning her autobiographical project was to discover just how her 'second' life came about: how she made the transition from wife and mother to poet. Her son Martin Edmond's book *The Autobiography of My Father* shows the criticism she received from some of her family members because of the way this transition occurred. Using the epiphany of the spiritual autobiography to illustrate the moment of transition gives her life direction and meaning, as well as sanctioning her actions through Art.

Janet Frame in *An Autobiography* also writes the 'one story' of the struggle of the New Zealand artist. However, the particular aspect of society against which she struggles, its conformity, is the most dangerous, for although she does not face the risk of jail for breaking its social laws, as Sargeson does when he is tried in Wellington, she is still imprisoned, or institutionalised, for nearly a decade of her life. The same year that she comes of age is the first year that she is institutionalised for her inability to adapt, or conform, to society's expectations. Like Daphne Withers in *Owls Do Cry* (1957) she becomes one of society's victims, while at the same time attempting to redeem society by means of her art, or rewriting the story of her life to show her institutionalisation to have been simply 'an awful mistake'.

The spiritual nature of Frame's autobiography is more complex than Sargeson's, Edmond's, or Ashton-Warner's, as there is no one obvious moment of epiphany. However, when Frame's autobiographical motives are examined - the individual or personal story she aims to tell is the story of how she was misdiagnosed as schizophrenic - it seems clear that to describe an epiphanic moment would be to go against her autobiographical project, even though King's biography of Frame returns to the theme of angels and describes a moment where she believed that her prayers had been answered by a higher power. Yet like the other writers in this discussion, she too draws on literary tradition to give her life shape and meaning, albeit second-hand through the poet Rilke. For Frame, the imaginative process - the process of creating literature - is shown to be a spiritual experience, as Rilke's Angel of the title of volume 2 of her autobiography becomes the Envoy of volume 3. Thus the manifestation of the figurative Envoy, who accompanies her to the Mirror City, has epiphanic connotations.

All of the writers examined in this thesis, Sargeson, Ashton-Warner, Edmond, and Frame, draw on Art to give their lives meaning and shape. It is no coincidence that the most influential work of literary autobiography based on the spiritual autobiography - Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* - should be one of the canonical modernist texts. For just as God is the ultimate signifier in the traditional spiritual autobiography or conversion narrative, the ultimate meaning of one's life, so is Art the ultimate signifier for the artist. The 'one story' of the Provincial New Zealand autobiographer is also the 'one story' of the modernist artist.

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